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March 1st

Adventure

THE WOLVES OF HOWLING BUTTE

by

Raymond S. Spears

Published Twice A Month

HAROLD LAMB · ROBERT CARSE · KARL W. DETZER

"Stay home—and gargle with Listerine every 2 hours"

THAT is what your doctor would probably tell you to do if you had an ordinary cold or simple sore throat. Combined with rest and warmth, it is an excellent treatment. Over and over again this has been proved in the past 50 years.

These ailments are caused by germs multiplying by millions in the mouth and throat. They are continually striving to overcome the forces of health in your body. They often succeed when body resistance is lowered by such things as wet feet, fatigue, lack of exercise, exposure to draughts, cold, sudden changes of temperature.

Their names are Streptococcus Hemolyticus (the streptococcus germ), Staphylococcus Aureus (pus), and Bacillus Influenzae.

Reduces mouth germs 98%

And undiluted Listerine, used as a gargle, kills these germs—all germs—almost instantly. In 15 seconds to be exact—the fastest time science has been able to measure accurately.

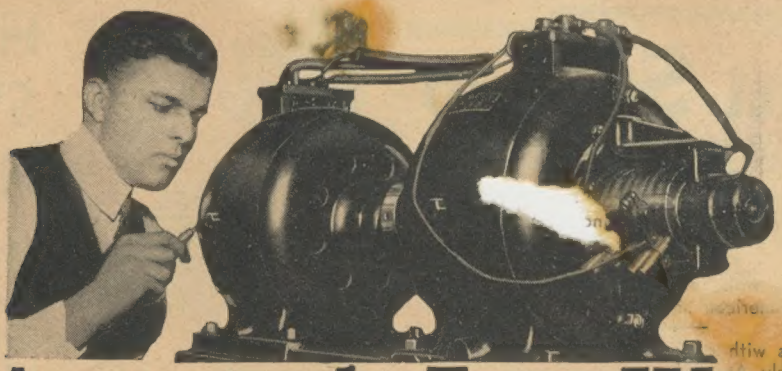
Repeated tests, similar to those employed at great universities, show that it actually reduces the bacteria on the surfaces of the mouth 98%. And at the same time soothes and heals inflamed membrane.

As a precaution

As a precaution against colds and irritated throat, gargle with undiluted Listerine every morning and every night. And when these have actually gained a foothold, increase the gargle to once every 2 hours, meanwhile consulting your physician.

The wonderful thing about Listerine is that while a potent germicide, it is at the same time non-poisonous, safe to use, pleasant to taste, and healing to tissue. Keep Listerine in home and office and carry it when you travel. At the first symptom of trouble use it undiluted to get full germicidal effect. Lambert Pharmacal Company, St. Louis, Mo., U. S. A.

KILLS 200,000,000 GERMS IN 15 SECONDS—HEALS TISSUE



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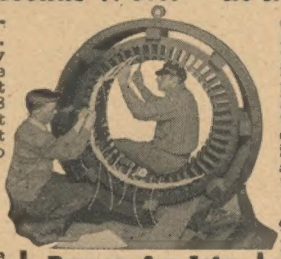

EARN WHILE YOU LEARN

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etc., etc. That's a glimpse of how we make you a master practical electrician in 90 days, teaching you far more than the average ordinary electrician ever knows and fitting you to step into jobs leading to big pay immediately after graduation. Here, in this world-famous *Parent school*—and nowhere else in the world—can you get this training!

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Volume 77 Number 6

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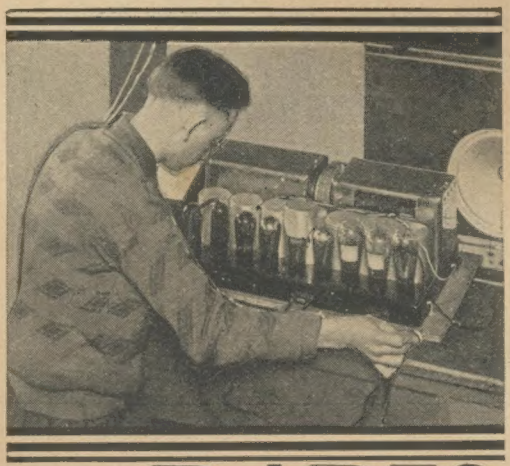

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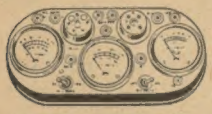

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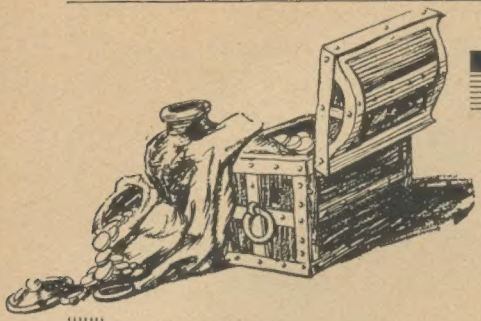

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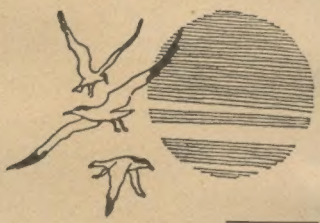

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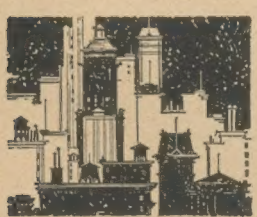

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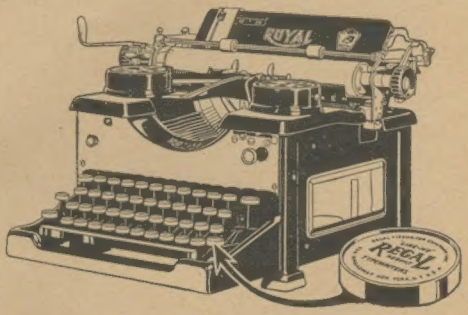

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Adventure

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A Novelette of the

The WOLVES *of*

CHAPTER I

BOBTAILED WOLVES

"I TELL you this Gov'ment's got to protect me!" a tall, thin, bowlegged man declared to Superintendent Reed Worley of the Bad Lands Survey.

"But, Mr. Bersch, the sheriff of your county and the State have jurisdiction over store robbing, cattle stealing, hold-ups—such crimes," Worley said. "The Federal Government simply looks after the grazing, sheep, horses, cattle, and depredations of a feral nature—"

"Ain't I told you they ain't human?" the visitor demanded. "It's a lotta varmints; that's the trouble. Wolves run helling around, like I said. Bob-tailed wolves, too!"

Superintendent Worley snorted—

"You actually tell me wolves rob stores, run off bunches of cattle, hold up farmers, steal sheep, raid farms?"

"That's what I tell you!" The man grimaced angrily. "Varmints—I've seen them. Everybody knows it. Here I be

Mysterious Bad Lands

By
RAYMOND
S.
SPEARS

HOWLING BUTTE

payin' taxes—income, school an' so on—an' the sheriff he says see the Federals an' now the Survey says see the sher'f! None of you is any danged good!"

"Just show me on the map, there, where wolves have raided a store and stolen its stock," the superintendent suggested, nonplused.

"Here's Squarehead," the man pointed out, "an' the railroad through it east an' west. North is Tinpans, where I live, an' the creek empties into Creeping River, so. Here's the prairie, twenty-five miles to me, twenty south to Rascal River from the town. Here's the Bad Lands, the Sand Dunes, an' from away north, here, to away south, here, them wolves run howling by in the night, an' come morning cows, horses, sheep gone, an' probably all the goods, like from my store, too, like I tell you."

"Where—just where have the wolf raiders actually been seen?"

"Right there't my store. Just Sunday night," the man said. "They run off cattle, horses of mine on Tinpans Creek

up here. They prob'ly took a whole band of sheep, west of us, in that bare country, here. They go down through them sloughs, botherin' a trapper, stealing two thousand mushrat hides—here. An' homesteaders south an' southwest of Roundstones, an' west an' south of Squarehead, here. You c'n ask anybody. What you fellers good for, anyhow—countin' sheep? Pizen gophers, c'yotes? Comes a genuwine complaint an' you say, 'Git a sher'f! Git a sher'f!' I'll see Congressman Ole Olsen, I will! Varmints eat us out o' herds an' homes!"

"Varmints rob *stores?*"

"Ain't I told you?" The visitor's voice rose. "You know breakfast food, compound oats? Boxes full, don't you?"

"Why, yes."

"An' worms gits in 'em?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then 'f I ask you to investigate, you come hell whooping?"

"Why, of course—"

"Well, damn my eyes! Here's a commissary gutted right out of all them breakfast foods, sugar in bar'ls, steel traps, harness, pails, blankets, the whole shooting match. A pack o' wolves done it! Been doin' it! Is all yer good for to hunt little green corn worms? That it?"

"But how do they carry away barrels of sugar? Do they pick 'em up in their teeth, or pack them on their backs, eh?" Worley was scornful and sarcastic.

"Why, damn it, ain't I been tellin' you?" Bersch demanded. "That's just 'zactly what I want ye to find out! Dad-blasted Government numbskull! By gad, I'll tell Ole Olsen. He knows me—he's Congressman."

"Now don't get excited . . . just what did happen?"

"Excited! Excited! Say, mister, I live in my sod house. A mean wind, drizzly night—a pack o' wolves comes howling by. In the mornin' I goes out to my store't the corner an' she's gutted!"

"Oh, I see! You mean Border wolves—bandits, desperados, like Jesse James, Butch Cassidy of the Hole-in-the-wall?"

"I mean wolves, big gray wolves—a whole pack of 'em!" the man shouted angrily. "Twict as big as big coyotes—paws like dogs. Why, hell, I lived out here before you Gov'ment whippersnappers was borned, an' I gotta depend on you, all us farmers, stock raisers an' settlers! My law— Well, Congressman Olsen, he'll—"

"Of course, if it's wolves—varmints—I'll send a man up there to clean them out," Superintendent Worley declared heartily. "He can catch them, too—if they are wolves, outlaw wolves—any kind of wolves. But I never heard of wolves, except human ones, robbing stores. Has any one seen them? They have hair, do they?"

"Sure. Didn't I tell you I'd seen them?" Bersch said.

"Just ordinary wolves?"

"Why—uh-h—" the man hesitated, twisted a little. "Why, all but they—course, they ain't got any tails."

"Haven't any tails? You say they're bobtailed wolves?"

"That's what they look like, anyhow," Bersch said uneasily. "I know they ain't got any tails. I seen 'em plain as day. Everybody says the same thing. Course—well, anyhow, they're wolves an' that makes 'em varmints, don't it? If they rob stores, that ain't any excuse for you to crawl out, is it? We pay you, we pay a lot of fellers runnin' around catchin' coyotes, puttin' out prairie dog an' gopher pizen—all them things. Now we gotta job that does some good for you, an' you want to come look for little green corn worms. Just because them wolves ain't got no tails don't let you out, does it?"

"Oh, no," Worley said. "Gray bobtailed wolves, eh? All right, Mr. Bersch, I'll see that this is carefully investigated—"

But Bersch was sarcastic.

"Yeh, an' when you find them bobtails ain't specified in the 'Gov'ment Range Laws and Reg'lations', course you'll lay down an' quit!"

"Well, we'll find if our authorization by Congress permits us under the appro-

priate act to exterminate bobtailed—"

"Let me tell you, mister," Bersch shouted, "beside bobtail wolves, is a big damned white raven, too, an' if you ain't permitted to offset them by Congress, Ole Olsen finds out we get a new Congressman from this district an' try again, by golly!"

With that the visitor departed, clutching his wide hat in one hand.

PUZZLED, Worley studied the map. Then he looked down the list of his rangers, Government trappers, assigned to duty at Reaka Crossing. Just lately Washington had sent along a Civil Service Government trapper, a fond pat on his back, and with a treat-him-nice recommendation. Kit Hudson was new and untried. In Reaka he was suspected of being an undercover investigator.

Waiting for an assignment, Hudson was the most available man, and Worley sent his secretary for him.

Worley answered Hudson's salute in kind, and repeated the statement of the store owner and rancher from beyond Squarehead. Hudson listened with a puzzled expression on his face until the bobtailed wolf pack was mentioned.

"You say *bobtailed* wolves?" Hudson inquired quickly.

"Yes, sir, bobtailed wolves," Worley repeated. "You'll go make a reconnaissance through the infested territory, select a good camping place, begin a campaign to rid the region of this nuisance."

"Wolves that rob crossroads stores, sir?"

"I should add they run off cattle, kill sheep and annoy horses, particularly mares and colts," the superintendent carefully explained. "If they merely attacked stores, it would let us out, but many head of grazing stock have been driven off or destroyed. The complaint specifies bobtailed wolves. Your job is to get those wolves, whether they are guilty or not; sentence of extermination has been passed on gray wolves, cougars, coyotes, as you know. At the same time we desire complete reports regarding their raids on commissaries, in case some sentimentalist should have a good word to say about lobos, understand."

"Yes, sir."

Hudson studied his superior officer, then gave a snappy salute and left. But on the balcony of the headquarters he scratched his head as he considered his orders.

His assignment as trapper to the Bad Lands Survey had come as the result of a ninety-nine per cent. correct Civil Service examination. The experiment of sending a trained scientist into the field as a destroyer of vermin animals didn't set so well on the Reaka division. The idea of a man learned in books and a stranger in the land being able to cope even with native coyotes, let alone gray lobo wolves was humorous as well as insulting to local talent.

Hudson was a nice fellow, had no airs and no one could find any fault with his outfit; but the field workers preferred to do their own investigating, make their own observations and file their own reports. Going to the dormitory, Hudson brought out his packs which were ready for loading, except personal duds. These, including his portable typewriter, working library and his experimental kit, he threw together in a few minutes,. Now that he was packing, one of the boys asked him what traps he would need, and Hudson took requisition blanks against the time when he had made up his mind what he ought to have, which could not be determined till he had looked over the country.

Loading two packhorses, he saddled Blight and rode through town heading west. Quite a few people along the street in Reaka stopped to watch him on his way, feeling important and somewhat embarrassed, elated at last on having an assignment.

Out of town wire fences held him for miles to the westbound highway, but presently breaks appeared in the wire and before sundown he was in the open

prairie, turning south from the meandering trail and going down a dry wash into the Rascal River bottoms where he camped for the night on a cottonwood flat. Dropping the packs from his horses, he hobbled the animals, opened out his bedroll and cooked himself a fine supper over a handful of driftwood sticks and twigs. He felt better to be alone, on his first Government trapper scout.

After other days' rides, an evening saw Kit Hudson riding along the meandering, rippling green water stream through the weird and mysterious Bad Lands of the upper Rascal River. The flat was long, narrow, enclosed by walls of clay, sandstone, brown lignite, pale gravels and spotted conglomerates. On high bluffs were odd lumps and convolutions of yellow sandstone like heads and figures of fabulous beasts and monsters, or distorted toadstools, frost cut, water dissolved and sand blasted by winds of the ages.

Hudson came to a wider flat, where great cottonwood trees stood in scattered dignity; other smaller cottonwoods grew up a terrace slope and across a bench to another terrace up to a level bench, that bore still smaller trees. Above them rose a Bad Lands wall in layers that had the wash of cloudbursts fixed in each one, intricate, indelible and beautiful.

At the head of the flat the north and south side walls drew together and between them was a huge, convoluted dome, like a bell in whose bulging sides were black eyes and shadows that revealed enormous worm holes exposed by the washing of the strata edges, indicating the formation was full of caves and tunnels. Bank swallows had bored a thousand nest holes in level lines along one earthy layer which was particularly adapted to their mining operations, and he suspected that within some of the openings were caverns that sheltered night flyers, bats.

Hudson looked at his wrist watch. Sunset was two hours away. He had traveled leisurely, starting early but stopping whenever he found good camping. Here was a fine place to stay.

As he glanced lazily around his horses threw up their heads with one motion of tense alarm. A quick, sharp barking yelp reached his ears and, looking around in swift glances, he saw strung along the crest of a hogback ridge, silhouetted against the southeastern sky, five far leaping beasts, too large to be coyotes—gray lobo wolves, big ones and on the romp!

With a snatch he threw up his binoculars. No mistake—lobos! A big old fellow, a slender female just behind, a gallumping two-year-old with an ungainly, limping gait, and two yearlings. They vanished as his eyes photographed them on his memory. He stood glaring after them, scowling and amazed.

He had seen their faces, eyes turned over their shoulders watching him. He had caught the lift of their manes along the backs of their necks, angry at his intrusion. Their strides had been long, graceful and free, yet in each one a perceptible break. He had heard a jeering taunt in their shrill, yelping notes. A trained and careful observer, he had caught the upright pointing of three pairs of ears, and the laying back in hateful scorn of two pairs. He had even noted the shimmering of light as the fur fluff was raised by a gust of the northwest wind.

He could not be mistaken; not one of the five beasts had a plume; they were bobtailed wolves!

"Well, obviously I've reached the district," Hudson mused as he looked around. "Here are the Bone Nest Prairies to the north, then; this is my destination."

His horses were twitching nervously. They, too, had seen the incredible scoundrels of the prairies and Bad Lands, brutes which mocked science and appeared to revert to the superstitions of medieval Europe, Russia, the Black Forest, to origins of folklore, sagas, traditions.

"Fairy and witch stuff!" Hudson sneered at the evidence of his own eyes. "Superstition and fireside tales; man-

wolves, werwolves; wers—human animals—nonsense; stuffed pseudo-science—underworld of the intellect!"

He threw down his packs, hobbled and turned out his horses. He pitched his tent, started a fire, unstrapped his blanket roll and filled loose leaf pages on his typewriter, recording exact details and stuck his tongue in his cheek, mocking his own statements which just couldn't be true—yet to every one of which he could make oath.

CHAPTER II

DEAD MAN'S CABIN

ACCORDING to his map, guessing at the distance he had come, Hudson figured he could not be far from south of Bone Nest Prairies. Across the Rascal River bluffs rose to a perpendicular height of nearly two hundred feet, the grass sod fringing the brink. All along his route the north wall had been precipitous, cut at intervals by deep, narrow washes, draws, basin sags into which led game trails and, at a few places, old wagon ruts. He had seen no fresh sign of humans for two days. Few came across the Rascal, even fur trappers seldom entering those Bad Land fastnesses to the south.

Somewhere in the open prairies to the north a railroad now followed the divide westward between the Rascal and Creeping Rivers. The old ranches on the wagon road were gone with the cattle, and all but the little clusters of cabins and corral of an outfit or two. The old domains of uncounted acres had been surveyed and cut into quarter sections and these taken up. Homesteads were scattered in a belt along the rails and line of telegraph poles—tiny frame buildings, tar paper shacks, old sod houses with tin can additions—oil containers filled with earth and laid like bricks, spiked down so they wouldn't slip. The immense one-brand herds of beef were gone.

Now small bands of horses, bunches of cattle, even flocks of sheep grazed over abandoned claims, or lands not yet taken up. small patches of wheat, forties and eighties, indicated the hope of dry farming; luxuriant rectangles of weeds growing tall revealed lands abandoned by people of lost hopes. Short gray wisps stood ghost-like in curly-grass dotted spreads of baked clay—sagebrush sprouts returning to the untilled ground.

Hudson had come nearly two hundred miles west of the Missouri and now he was two days beyond the last sign of human occupation in the Rascal River bottoms. Four days previous he had seen a man on horseback, silhouetted against the sky to the north, a lone, far figure, like a scout or a savage of other times. No cattle had been driven down into the Bad Lands for winter cover, and there were no signs that the homesteaders crossed the Rascal with their little bunches in this upper river, though down east he had seen places where ancient cattle, even buffalo trails, were still used in a small way, community outfits indicating winter occupation though no one was in the crude camps. A band of horses, about thirty in number, unbroken and perhaps really wild, had snorted and dashed away along the river bottoms upon his approach.

Over the region brooded the silent alertness of feral creatures, the furtive withdrawal from view of those on the ground, the quick flight of the winged tribes. Wherever there were sand or dust patches, or the many kinds of clay and alkali that dried hard, he saw the intaglio prints of paws, hoofs and claws, but none of human feet or shod horses. On him rested the spirit of the unknown and the mysterious, making it difficult to distinguish between the real and commonplace, creature shadows and spectral presences.

Here the bobtailed wolves roamed. He had reached the heart of the country where his work of trapping for the Bad Lands Survey began. The enormous spaciousness had its niches, crannies, corners and labyrinthian cuts and gulches. Whether high in the open or threading some narrow draw, he was depressed and puzzled by inexplicable impressions.

That night when his fire was but a red glow in light ashes, he rolled into his bed to sleep, content with his lot. But no sooner was he in slumber than with a start he awakened to sit up again, disturbed by another utter absurdity.

Toward the north beyond the high bluff brink on the prairie, he heard plainly loud cries, wails, snatches of wind borne chanting and song. Echoes reverberated in the walled cañon gorges. Staring, he saw red reflections and then tongues of flame and wisps of smoke against the sky in the dark space beneath the North Star.

Astonished, he saw along the crest of the bluff people on whom their own coal oil can torchlights shone pink and red—weird, whiskered, long haired naked people parading by; men, women and children whose shouts were filled with imprecations and whose wailings quavered fearfully in the night like moanings of lost souls.

Scores trooped by, whooping, yelping, singing in darts and pauses, and through his glasses Hudson could see the sinewy arms and the ribbed bodies, the raised faces as fire was waved toward the breaks as though hurling curses upon all the occupants, of whom the government trapper was now one. In his bones he felt the imprecations that were being showered upon him and all who dwelt there.

"Doukhobors!" he suddenly exclaimed. "Those exiled Russians!"

Identification did not make the apparitions less weird or marvelous. When the voices had died away in the distance and the sparkle of the flambeaux had slowly vanished like a wandering prairie fire over a far, high roll of a tidal wave of ground, and he had curled up in his blanket again to sleep, a coyote howled far south in the Bad Lands, its answer to those wandering fanatics.

IN THE MORNING Hudson stirred out at false dawn. Before sunrise he was through breakfast, had rolled up his blanket, and killed a rattlesnake that had crawled under his bed roll tarp. First of all he looked around for a camp site with good water close by. A more favorable basin could hardly have been imagined.

The trees along the stream bottom were more than two feet through; those on the second terrace were more than a foot through, too large to be handled conveniently by one man; but on the third terrace, nearly a hundred feet above the stream level, the growth was of six or seven inch trunks, straight and tall, fine for a trapper's cabin walls.

The trees stood in a thick sand, some of the coarse flat foliage having fallen, and the rest were yellow in autumnal color. The buffalo brush was richly dotted with clusters of red berries. He noticed a wisp of gray fog, wreath of mist, over one point of the woods, and he wondered if there might not be a tiny spring at the base of the Bad Land precipice which rose a hundred feet above the tree canopy, enough water to be worked into a sufficient camp supply.

Suddenly, as he followed along the base of the cliff, he came to a cabin built snug against the sandstone wall, fairly under a bulge. Flat stones had been laid up skilfully in alkali mortar, and a peaked roof, supported by six inch cottonwood timbers, was shingled as with thick slate at a steep pitch to shed not only rain but drifted snow. A fireplace chimney led into a characteristic hole in the irregular face of the cliff, dissipating the smoke.

A great stack of firewood had been logged off into fire chunks and an ax leaned against a chopping block, its head red with rust and the helve warped, split and gray with age. A good woodsman had cut that fuel. For years an armful of sticks had been lying ready for a fire. Greased linen paper had veiled the small window ports, but some of this was eaten by worms in odd streaks. The front door was a beef rawhide with hair on, drawn over a pole frame and hung on wooden fork hinges. It swayed gently like a loose leaf in the morning breeze.

A saddle, bridle and blanket hung under an extension shed, weather cracked and the interstices laced with dusty spider

webs. Hudson rolled his eyes. Unless one followed the foot of the cliff like a wild feline, the cabin was invisible in the dense growth of cottonwoods, even as near as twenty yards, the stone walls looking like a part of the rocky cliff.

Just at the side of the cabin, back under a stratum of stone was a pool of water two feet deep and ten feet or so across, catching the drip of seepage from the sandstone. A trickle of runoff ran out of a big "wormhole" at the back. The moisture from this had made the little cloud of mist above the tree tops.

Hudson was gazing with suspicion around him when a thick rattlesnake oozed along a wall and another long, slim, wriggle of horror reared in a rattle of crisp indignation at his intrusion. Impatiently the trapper shot both with his .22 automatic and, walking warily, pushed open the door, whose skin insects had not attacked, perhaps because of alkali dressing. Serpents and insects preempt the abandoned homes in the wake of men's desert failures. Here skill and care had labored; the floor was of small logs hewn on three sides, the grain fine and straight; these small trees were probably older than the big, well watered ones below.

At the threshold he stopped short. On the floor beside a homemade table was the ruin of a man, a skeleton partly covered by collapsed fabrics. The skull lay white, reddish hair on the floor; in a bare white rib was a bullet hole. A home cast .45 bullet, its nose flattened, was under the arch. Stains indicated the man coming through the door had fallen on his way to the pole frame bunk. In his bone hands was clutched a revolver, three .45 caliber cylinders emptied. He had been shot in the back.

The buckle and studs of a belt remained after the gnawing of rodents. Silver ornaments lay with more than two score of darkened disks, double eagle gold coins; a skinning knife in an Indian bead sheath was bright, its edge keen, as good as ever.

The bunk was high, covered with brain and smoke tanned buffalo robes. Cedar boughs after many years were still faintly fragrant. Hanging, dust on every exposed fiber, was clothing on wooden fork hooks pegged to the wall. A man's wide hat was dragged down by its own weight and that of dust. Boots whose very soles had been eaten from around the pegs by mice rested on the floor. Overhead draped from cross poles were skins, rawhide thongs, and a bag of salt where nothing could get at it.

"A hunter's cabin," Hudson thought. "Looks like he might have lived here alone. Perhaps a fugitive from justice—a hermit renegade."

On the walls were buffalo horns and antlers of deer for hooks, as well as sapling crotches. A long .50-110-550 single shot rifle was supplied by boxes of ammunition on rows of close set pegs along a battened crack between two well matched, hewn, side wall logs. A repeating .44 caliber brass mounted rifle, dating back to the early '70s leaned against a cedar root chair. Over the chair back was draped a two-holster belt with cap-and-ball Colt revolvers.

Hudson went into the open air to study the surroundings. Trees had been left so that the cabin was screened from view in every direction. The cabin fireplace chimney led into a cave hole in the bluff wall, so that the smoke was scattered in the hollows of the ground—invisible.

"Just the place I'm looking for," he exulted, adding as he thought of the dead man, "I'm not superstitious!"

Accordingly he carefully gathered up the bones and carried them out. A shelf slit in the cliff offered a convenient crevice and, having wrapped the remains in an antelope skin, he bundled it tightly and then walled it in the niche with a few flat stones; a good tomb for the man who had been shot and died when he reached this place.

This duty performed, Hudson brushed down the walls and swept the cabin floor. The dust was suffocating, and the work had to be done repeatedly. The robes and hides, hung out in the sun, had to be whipped and swept down with the buffalo

brush broom, till they were limp and clean. By noon he moved his own outfit in, with everything to his liking.

AFTER eating a prairie chicken and hot bread, he cleaned all the old firearms, and as they had been well greased, they were now as good as ever. He tried out the old Colt with powder from a prodigious Texas steer horn, capped them from one of the fresh boxes on the mantel and took a whack with first one, then the other, until he had shot and emptied all the cylinders. Those round bullets thwacked loudly into the wood, and four notches on one butt, three on the other, could mean only that their owner had used them in deadly man fights.

The temptation to try the great prairie rifle was equally irresistible. He took one of the shells, a brass tube with a long patched slug, shoved it into the breech and looked around for a mark. Only when he climbed the rough face of the bluff and looked away down at the beaver dam stillwater a good one hundred and sixty rods distant, where a nubbin top of a submerged boulder dotted an acre of glistening surface, did he see one that seemed adequate for so venerable and great a weapon. Resting over a jut in the ledge, he leveled the barrel, lifted the sights for half a mile, aimed at leisure and took up the three pound trigger pull slack, letting drive.

Thick blue smoke belched forth, obscuring the vision; the stock set back with a shoulder kick like a ten-gage shotgun; the roar rumbled and thundered among the precipices. He stood up and wondered at the placid acres—if he had missed all that surface; then the water geysered at the mark—an undershot of inches—and rings of the splash rolled out, rimmed in sunshine, toward the shores, wider and wider.

Taking out his maps, he located his position by a sharp south bend in the stream about two miles below. A mass of domes, peaks, draws, stream forks and meanders were topographically indicated to begin upstream a mile or two. The legend "Howling Butte" would seem to mean the bell shaped, fluted dome at the head of the flat which his camp site would have overlooked but for the thick stand of trees on the bench and terraced slope.

The Rascal River country had been the last refuge of the wild and wanton humanity that refused every restraint except that imposed on their kind by their own bullies, and these could, in stress, be overwhelmed or slain.

Here, now, were the wild creatures in undisturbed nature, unless the signs were misleading. Deer, coyotes, badgers, mink, otter, beaver, muskrats, ferrets, innumerable jackrabbits and other rodents, a hundred species of birds from bald eagles to peregrine falcons winged above those fastnesses, ideal for experiments with snares and steel traps to decimate species. Here, too, he could lay out strychnine, cyanide and other government poisons, annihilating a species within a reasonable distance, reporting the consequences, whether it was a good thing or not, thus to disturb the local balance of nature, the *status quo* of wild creatures. If the big wolves had not been bobtails he would have felt perfectly serene, a scientist at ease.

He filled a requisition blank such as are issued by the Survey to the trappers, and carefully filled in the printed form for steel traps, No. 415 and 415-X—the latter with teeth in offset jaws—for gray wolves, and added requirements of drags, bait catch traps, snares and other accessories.

Whistling for Blight, his horse, he gave him and his pack animals as well a few lumps of cane sugar and put out blocks of rocksalt for them to lick. In the morning he put up a lunch and rode up his valley to the head, where the Rascal split past the bell butte, deep water on the north side but a hardpan gravel ripple on the south, up which he waded to another bottom a few hundred feet above the narrows.

At this flat a deep draw had washed a basin in the prairies to the north, in the direction of the railroad. Ascending to

the rolling heights, for miles the great sodland undulated in all directions down to the Bad Lands. Here and there was a high butte, or table mountain, a monument to other prairies of long ago.

When the government trapper topped another rise ten or twelve miles north of Rascal River, he could see the spread of this wild life domain. There were hundreds of square miles of prairie under his gaze, the Bad Lands glistening along the south border.

A coyote darted from a low bush in which it had bedded down, so Hudson jumped his horse in pursuit, letting fly a clipful of .22's, but the beast ducked into the head of a dry wash and vanished. No matter; a barrel of traps would soon be coming . . .

Except for the pack of bobtailed wolves, scoundrels which not only raided wild game in the Bad Lands but were officially accused of live stock destruction and robbing a store at a prairie crossroads, his assignment would have been gloriously commonplace in its details and variety of tasks.

Whatever was behind that phenomenon, into whatever mysteries it might lead, he must cope with the brutes and uncover the secrets that lurked behind them.

CHAPTER III

SQUAREHEAD

THE GRASS grown ruts of a prairie road began in an abandoned homestead cabin yard. This led to a divide from the crest of which Squarehead first came into view. Cottonwood poles, warped boards, a wire fence with sagging, broken strands of red rust, and a quarter section with two forties which had been sod broken in a struggle to earn a living marked the line of frontier to which the settlers had come; but they had been forced to retreat from it, unable to hold the claimed lands. The town of three grain elevators and numbers of little buildings, strung like beads on the railroad and telegraph line, was silhouetted darkly against the sky at the horizon on another divide.

Faint trails at desolate four-corners of abandoned homes fed into the north trail, which grew plainer and plainer. After hours and miles over the vagaries of a pioneer road, the horse quickened his stride. Knowing Kit Hudson, Blight anticipated grain at a livery stable now within sight, corral and all; the eager stride presently became a cantering romp into the main street of Squarehead.

Hudson had been for many days alone in the wilds. The streets seemed to crowd him in. Used to looking upon unbroken miles, he was startled, felt confused, by the proximity of windows, and resisted with difficulty the tendency to shy wide of people he met as he went along the sidewalk. At the Mustang Hotel restaurant he ducked through the entrance, hungry for a prepared meal after having cooked so many of his own. The odor of coffee and soup was strong and fascinating in his nostrils.

A buxom, smiling woman with a cool, appraising gaze came to serve him, presenting a menu. He was surprised to find this was Thursday; he had thought it was Monday. Soup, roast beef, mashed potatoes, coffee, a glass of sweet milk, native peas would do him for the present. After he began eating a burly, bowlegged man ambled from the hotel office into the dining room, where he stared at the patron who was alone in the place; it was three o'clock in the afternoon.

"Howdy," Hudson greeted him. "You're the proprietor?"

"Yeh."

"Wonder if I could have a room tonight?"

"The Mustang's open for business."

"I'm tired, but I don't expect to sleep much; been out too long to be comfortable in a real bed."

"Long riding?"

"Riding a long ways," Hudson answered, conscious of an emphasis in the question. "I headed in at Reaka down't the railroad crossing."

"You did!" the man said sharply. "Sporting, I expect?"

"Trapper."

"Don't expect to make a livin' trappin' through here, do ye?"

"Oh, I'll get along—in the Bad Lands."

The man glared at him. Hudson restrained an impulse to tell him the Government had sent him in. This would have to come out in time. Perhaps reticence would gain some slight sidelight on conditions which it would be useful to have. These raw, ignorant populations were not any too appreciative of the professional and scientific representatives sent in to correct difficulties natives had failed to solve and overcome.

"What part of the Bad Lands?" the man presently demanded.

"That any of your business?" Hudson asked, his voice sharp at that invasion of a privacy the West respects—except when deliberately insulting.

"Why, I have cattle down thataway—" The man's voice changed as he saw his mistake regarding the stranger's experience, sensitiveness or knowledge.

"Look my meat over any time you come by," Hudson said, quietly. "If I'm cramped and need a yearling— What's your brand?"

"Spoke-Wheel—" the answer was hesitating. "'Course, I didn't mean anything. I just thought—"

"You thought likely a trapper might use big bait," Hudson said. "But I work with cattlemen, not against them."

"Sometimes a man's tired of venison," the other said. "Out here 'tain't like it used to be, knocking down meat when you need it."

"I don't help myself to any one's meat," Hudson remarked, dryly. "In my country people average honest and mind their own business."

"Ah-h, I didn't mean a thing, stranger."

"Oh, yes you did. You gave me fair warning about keeping off your property, before I'd shown my hand. But I'm on the level—no harm done. Now we understand each other. Any hard feelings?"

"No, sir; not a bit, old man!"

"Glad of that. I'm friendly."

They shook hands, and the hotel man said—

"My name's O'Bale."

"Mine is Kit Hudson—everywhere I roam."

O'Bale's eyes turned away. Old scars marred his face. The middle finger of his right hand was off at the second joint—perhaps tangled in a rope loop. As he turned to stump heavily on his way, he had a slight limp—a battered old-timer. He nodded "O.K." to the waitress as she came through with Hudson's coffee. She smiled pleasantly on the Government man.

"We're way out yonder, next to nowhere," she explained. "Not many strangers come through, especially riding. Sure a sight for hungry eyes, a rider with a rifle scabbard—like old times. Nobody's trapped the Bad Lands late years—furs and hides down and most men have bigger business to do'n that."

"There you go!" Hudson exclaimed tartly. "Slamming me because I'm a trapper. I'm a Government trapper."

"Oh-h!" she cried. "Gov'ment man—I heard complaint had been made and they had sent a wolver in." Her voice dropped, "Do look out—stranger! There's a bad element around."

"And bobtailed wolves?" he said in a low voice.

"Have you heard them riding by in the night wind?" she asked in a whisper. "Yes, sir! The Gov'ment sent a trapper, did they? Well, I wish you more luck'n I expect you'll have."

"Rough as that?" He smiled. "When I was assigned through here they made me wonder. Kind of a particular job, you know—different."

"Good trapping through this country," the girl sighed. "Many a homesteader has eked out his table money catching furs and wild hides. Ever since the first talk of the outlaw pack some have argued the way the Gov'ment kills off everything to be worse'n what damage the bobtails do. You see, you fellows kill off everything—poison, trapping, shooting.

When you come that's the end of homesteader and any kind of trapping."

"Vermin animals," Hudson protested. "That's our job."

"I don't know much about it," she confessed. "I'm native. I was born to the old Slant-Bars outfit. I'm past thirty years now. When I was a little girl, I rode these pastures here; no railroad, no homesteaders, lots of game, neighbors thirty or fifty miles away. You'd see a cowboy building a johnnie on a butte, to mark the way to his outfit. Scattered cattle was out in the prairies, which were covered with flowers, and they grassed on the sweetest blooms, seems like. My father was Dan'l Catone, and he sent me East to school to be a teacher—civilized. A nester had come into the Bad Lands, the first one in all this country; rustlers bothered some, and there was fighting, with some hangings; and when I came back West homesteaders were in; the outfit was the same but open pasture was being taken up, crowding out fifteen thousand head—and here I am waiting on table! Can you beat it?"

"What happened?" Hudson asked. "If it's any of my business—"

"GOOD and plenty. The railroad came through and the contractors bought beef, no questions asked—all the big outfits lost half their herds that way," she answered. "Then the homesteaders' dogs 'd stampede the bunches of cattle, run them into cutbank draws. I've seen a hundred head in one fall like that—all squirming and groaning, wounded and gored, broken legs. Planted wheat and corn without fences made hard feelings—beef headed into the fields, 'course. We had to keep our cattle off, but dad was shrewd, successful. He made plenty money. He progressed. Going with a shipment to Kansas City, Omaha, even Chicago, he'd return with gold. We'd play with the coins on the table. Then he'd ride down into the Rascal Bad Lands with most of it, and one time he never returned.

"We waited, but he was gone forever. Some thought one thing, some another—shot down by rustlers, caught in quicksand, died alone, for he was growing old; but perhaps he just lit out, money and all, for new country, big pastures, a new home . . . I don't believe he'd leave me that way, though, do you?"

"He wouldn't leave his daughter nor his outfit." Hudson shook his head.

"I don't like to think he would," she said. "I hate to think of him dying alone. If he'd found horsethieves or a nester, a whisper would have returned; somebody would have told; I'd heard."

"Was he a tall, thin man?"

"No, sir; a chunky, square set little man, less'n a hundred and forty pounds, quick, fast, mighty hard to fool." The girl sighed. "That was in the bad years in this country. I've saved the old outfit. When I'm lonesome I come in here to work. That way I keep off the tax sales, too.

"Homesteaders swarmed in. They spread all over the land. They went out just so far; now they are turning back. Farmers go back East where there's lots of water and lands are cheaper. This isn't farm country; it never could be. It should have been kept grazing pastures. Look't the hungry faces of homesteaders and the worried look of the men and women; only cowboys could laugh in this country. I'm sorry for them, disappointed; years wasted, draggin' their feet, stubborn and hanging on, miserable but brave—hope blowing away like snow in the Chinook wind. Ain't it pitiful? You're Gov'ment—why don't *you* tell them?"

"Oh, it isn't in my department," Hudson said hastily.

"It's the department of anybody who knows the truth, to tell it." the girl said, with quick resentment; then, smiling, "I reckon I sound forlorn, an' I should smile you a welcome, Mr. Gov'ment Trapper. Watch where you ride—plenty badger holes in the prairie!"

"Won't be so many when we've cleaned up the vermin," he suggested, smiling playfully at her.

"So I've heard from some who've crossed country where you boys operate," she said gravely. "Prairie dogs poisoned, gophers gathered up in heaps five foot high, badgers laid out, coyotes gone from the range, leaving only the wind to howl. I don't know 'f it makes much dif'rence, but I suppose it gives you boys jobs. Somebody has to take 'em, they say, to keep the records and books balanced."

"You're *Miss* Catone?" Hudson asked.

"Prairie Catone—" She nodded. "I was married once, but took my own name back. I've a foolish dream my ranch'll all come back—if I could find the gold my dad buried; but the Bad Lands are big, and when he rode away, hiding his profits, he'd be gone three, four days. Maybe riding down there you'll find it."

"If I do, I'll bring it to you loaded on a pack horse, perhaps two horse loads," Hudson said gaily.

"I believe you would," she answered, staring at him. "I really do b'lieve it. I could have gone to my relations, back East. Instead I stayed here. Prob'ly I was wild and foolish, but I love it. The wind is music in my ears. Some don't like it, but I couldn't get along without it. You can still the coyote songs, trapper, but the wind'll always blow through the prairies and rattle the weeds."

"What kinds of guns did your father have?" Hudson asked.

As she frowned, trying to recollect, a jamboree racket sounded outside—yells, yowls, clattering of sheet metals.

"What on earth!" Hudson exclaimed.

"Holy Rollers," the girl answered and, going to the doorway, they watched a little mob coming down the middle of the street. She continued, "Now't they've harvested and sold, they're driving spooks."

"Driving spooks?" he repeated.

"Exactly what they are." She laughed shortly. "A spell rests on all this country; hard luck—all witched and bedeviled. Things break wrong. Nobody can explain some happens. The Doukhobors say it's the evil spirit haunts us, and the funny part of it is, nobody can prove they aren't right. They've the best of the argument. Reckon you don't believe in ghosts and weirds?"

"Not especially—not violently superstitious." Hudson shook his head, grinning. "Oh, I knock wood, I throw salt over my shoulders, and I carry a good luck piece. Why?"

"In this country—" she smiled, frowning, too—"I feel pretty level headed myself. Probably it's just foolishness. Anyhow, it's something to argue about, good and plenty. How long 'll it be before you begin to look over your shoulders down in the Rascal Bad Lands?"

" 'Tisn't ghosts that'll worry me."

"Perhaps not, stranger," she assented dubiously. "And you're a Gov'ment trapper. They say they're good. They ought to be, 'course, keeping right at it, winter prime, spring breeding, summer spongy hides, fall hair coats—you keep practising."

"About these bobtailed wolves," Hudson urged. "I want to know—"

"Mister Man," Prairie Catone said, "don't ask me. I'm sociable, but at the same time, I mind my own business."

Hudson paid his bill and the girl left him abruptly. He turned into the gunstore where a tall man wearing spectacles looked over the tops of the glasses at him, with shrewd, speculative interest and welcome.

"My name is Kit Hudson," the visitor said. "Sent in from the Bad Lands Survey and Forest Headquarters at Reaka Crossing, about the wolves and other varmints—"

"Government trapper?" the gunsmith asked mildly. "I'm Thimbler."

"Yes."

"The paper said you'd been sent coupla weeks ago," the man remarked. "Boys were talking about it. They wondered just what you were after. Wolves?"

"Oh, yes—gray lobos, coyotes, ferrets, badgers, and chiefly the carnivorous raiders. And some rodents—experimentally."

"I've heard there are other kinds of wolves around—" The gunsmith deli-

cately adjusted a shotgun hammer spring.

"Bobtailed wolves?" Hudson asked. "What is there to that, anyhow? What do you make of it?"

"I don't make anything of it." Thimbler shook his head. "You see, I'm a gunsmith; keeps me fair to middling busy, too. I don't—uh—meddle. Fact is, in my profession a man is just naturally obleeged to keep neutral, open minded—what you might call sensible."

"But—bobtailed wolves!" Hudson exclaimed. "What's the big idea?"

"If I was to go the limit—" the gunsmith worked a time on his task in hand—"if I was to talk, man to man, I'd say the main proposition is that—um-m—they're bobtailed."

"Oh, hell!" Hudson shrugged his shoulders and walked out. These old self-satisfied smart-alec small town people were insufferable. They always liked to pick on a Government man, especially.

Ahead of him at the railroad station was a familiar sign—Telegraph Office—and at the desk he drew a wire blank and wrote on it in swift, swinging script, the order for his hardware outfit, according to a requisition blank which he had already filled in.

When he looked up it was into the level eyes of a young woman who was remarkably good looking, impersonal and business-like. Even a Government trapper would do well to maintain his dignity in such a presence. She skipped her pencil over the list of orders, noted the "collect" and inquired—

"Night letter?"

"No, day," he replied. "How long will it be before they arrive?"

"Depends partly on when they are put on board," she replied.

"That will be tomorrow morning."

"Week or so," she said. "You're authorized to send collect?"

"Oh, yes."

She turned to the telegraph desk as though a Government trapper's official business shipment wasn't important.

"I'd like to know just when to come for those things," he urged.

"Give me your address and I'll notify you by telephone."

"But I'm in the Rascal Bad Lands—no mail, no phone, and no one anywhere near. I don't want to come up for nothing."

"If it's F.O.B. tomorrow, about a week, probably."

Hudson looked at her. She didn't look at him. Somehow, these public utilities employees seem to think—or don't seem to think. He left the office stalking like a military precisionist. The way this infested region questioned and snubbed him, he got the impression a Bad Lands Survey trapper wasn't much. He made up his mind indignantly that they would all find out, in due course.

CHAPTER IV

UNPROFITABLE INSULTS

LOOKING through the community, Kit Hudson saw that Squarehead's population numbered about five hundred. The community centered around the three rival grain elevators through which wheat was shipped, rainfall and other weather conditions permitting crops to ripen and be harvested. Down the track were whitewashed cattle loading corrals, and two double deck sheep runs, but the shipments would be in small bunches because the big pasture was broken up by scattered homesteads. Lately, though, a herd of six or seven hundred head was being worked by cowboys over the abandoned or open lands. Some of the homesteaders bunched their own cows and sent out boys to look after them, the youngsters lying at full length on the ponies, even sleeping there.

Strolling around, Hudson saw a newspaper office, the city hall and court house, a photograph gallery, two doctor signs, a dentist's, and in one outlying, sand blasted building a buyer of hides, furs, junk, and a dealer in second hand goods.

Few people were in sight except the excited, worrying, mobbing Doukhobors, who nearly all looked undersized, mourn-

ful and miserable, their garments misshapen as though half remembered folk costumes had supplied the styles. The few other spectators were tall, gaunt, hard boned Scandinavians, short, chunky Teutons; a few Hibernians and nondescripts stood or sat on their heels along the sidewalks watching the phenomena of protest. The town's architecture was Western, weathered wooden buildings, galvanized iron roofs, pressed plate imitations of stone, and low, one-story buildings tricked out with false fronts to look two floored; but nearly all those in sight were so obviously alien that Hudson felt misplaced in a strange land. But when he went into the bank to establish his account, the cashier, Fletcher, was alert—sure Yankee—and he gave the Government representative a real welcome.

"You're needed here, Mr. Hudson," Fletcher said. "This bohunk population needs straightening out. They blame Uncle Sam for everything, and graft on everything they can. Some bad actors around, too, who play on ignorance. You can show them what a real official means, revealing the difference between gray lobos and human wolves, educating those aliens — Doukhobors especially — as to what Government means."

When Fletcher turned to another patron Hudson departed, thoughtful. With the banker as a background of Governmental respect, there was hope for Squarehead's future. As he emerged from the bank he became conscious of surveillance; a tall, thin, gangling youth of about twenty years or so, who had been at the gunsmith's window, in the railroad station and in the street, stood near the bank door. When Hudson surveyed him with a cold, inquiring gaze, the fellow instantly essayed an utterly unconvincing air of innocence and indifference.

Hudson leisurely crossed the street to O'Bale's Mustang. He remembered having seen this chap hanging around there and it didn't seem so good to be under such scrutiny. In the Survey service a certain anxiety had perturbed the boys on the firing line. Working under Government auspices they were naturally fair game on the crude frontier for rough cowboy jokes, sheepherder observation, and even trapper jealousy, or unfair rivalries. No matter how kindly a Civil Service employee or an appointee of the politically great treated the citizenry of the back country, somehow there was a feeling, not always slight, which a servant of the public could not reciprocate nor yet ignore.

Feeling annoyed and nervous, Hudson circled back to the gunstore, where he almost immediately noticed out of the corner of his eyes that the lanky, nosey man was at the window, studying the assortment of firearms, traps, prospecting tools and samples of ammunition.

"Who's that at the window?" Hudson inquired casually. "Funny looking fellow—"

"I shouldn't call him funny," the gunsmith remarked, wiggling a little dingus in a radio trying to make it stop sticking. "He's Skep Dawder, the fastest, smoothest, straightest shooter with a short gun, right or left, hip, elbow or offhand shoulder squinting in all these parts, mister."

"*What?*"

"Prob'ly thinks you're a good joke, an'd like to see you dance—a real humorist, when he ain't serious, trapper."

"Why, you don't think he'd—"

"I mind my own business, regarding that youngster," the gunstore man said fervently. "He can let go with either hand with more kinds of holster, pocket an' small self-defense arms in less time with a greater percentage of accuracy than any one I ever saw—an' I'm sure a widely experienced more or less innocent spectator, on the average, than any one you ever saw east of the Missouri."

"But what's he tagging me around for?" Hudson demanded.

"Curiosity, I expect." The gunsmith grinned. "Strangers sure interest him—an' some of those fellers hanging out at the Mustang."

"But why chase me around?"

"Just hang around awhile," Thimbler said cheerfully. "I expect we'll all find

out about it presently. Skep, personally, ain't much of a talker, but his sign language is sure unmistakable, if he feels either playful or insulted. Perhaps he thinks something—"

"Thinks something—" Hudson surveyed his shadow, puzzled and perturbed. "I'm a Government trapper—that's positively all."

Thimbler said:

"Them fellers traveling with Skep may wonder about that." The gunsmith squinted at his repair job. "They claim to be trappers themselves—summers. Bring in some hides and furs, too. Feller name of Booksey they say can trap anything, even lobo gray wolves, the smartest animals that roam."

Hudson shook his head puzzledly.

"But they wouldn't object to operations to free cattle, sheep, horses, goats, poultry—all those things from wolf and coyote menace, would they? Not seriously object, that is?"

Thimbler grunted.

"They might—can't tell about some citizens," he said.

Hudson persisted—

"But think of food supplies, wool, horses."

"Coyotes is worth six-seven dollars," the gunsmith said. "Gray wolves twelve-fifteen, badgers, coons, mink—"

Hudson broke in—

"But I'm sent here by the Government."

"Mr. Hudson, I'm neutral," the gunsmith remarked dryly. "An' I ain't of an argumentative disposition. When the Gov'ment and its constituents falls out, my business is selling ammunition an' repairing offenses an' self-defenses, with no *pros* and *cons*. These fellers traps in prime fur an' hair seasons; you traps all the year around, salary an' expenses paid. Protecting domestic stock, you destroys fur business. Skep's iggerent, an' might think you got an unfair advantage thataway. He's the best short gun shot—got advantages on you, thataway, possibly. I just hope he admires your patriotism more than your competition."

HUDSON strolled on his way, thinking. He noticed, now, that when he was about so far on his way Skep Dawder stretched, looked around as though he was making up his mind—what there was of it—and then came shambling along in the same general direction the Government trapper was taking, first to the curb, then to the shop windows, hardly seeming to pay any more attention to his quarry than to the displays of merchandise. Skep's concealed weapons obviously made his loose clothing sag here and there. The scrutiny of bystanders was all covert, about equally divided, as Hudson surmised, between him and Skep.

Some smiled, as though they anticipated Skep was just about to spring one of his pranks. Others looked serious, as though they would like to give Hudson fair warning, yet dreaded the construction Skep might put on that interference with his business; some people with evident anxiety took their departure.

Hudson crossed to the Mustang, sat in an arm chair with his feet in the window, and began to read a St. Louis newspaper. Sitting there, trying with all his attention to read, he heard a voice meant to be low—

"See the Holy Rollers are on the prod again."

"Yeh — sure worried up," another chuckled. "They'd better be."

"Gov'ment int'rested?"

"Looks like," the answer returned. "Likely needs curryin' down't the hocks."

"Yeh-h," the other breathed.

Suddenly a burly, black hatted, smooth shaven fellow swaggered in from the street, whipped off his sombrero and slapped away its alkali dust on his knee.

"Howdy, ev'rybody!" he shouted, and from all sides came quick and respectful answers.

Hudson read on; a hush fell on the gathering in the lobby, holding the bystanders tense. Clumping footsteps approached Hudson, who did not look up, though he knew the new arrival had turned to him.

With a mighty sweep of the broad black hat in a big hand, he tore the newspaper from Hudson's grasp and pulled him partly around, chair and all.

"I said, 'Howdy ev'rybody'!"

Hudson rose to his feet, jerked his chair clear with his left hand and lifted his right fist with all his strength of straightening knees, surging hips, swinging shoulders. The knuckles landed on the protruding chin of the intruder, propelled by one hundred seventy-odd pounds that contacted with some two hundred, lifting the man up as though he had been swung on a meat hook. The fellow flopped over on his back and slid several feet along the floor.

Then Hudson, without a look at his victim, glanced around at the witnesses whose grins were frozen in astonishment.

"What the hell ails you?" Hudson demanded. "I mind my own business. But if any of you think you've anything to say or do about my affairs, now's your time to speak up and we'll settle it."

No one accepted the challenge; instead each countenance assumed an expression of the utmost indifference—but Hudson was angry. The youth who had trailed him was among those present, a lank, insolent, sneering prairie lout whose narrow eyes scowled as Hudson's glance fixed upon him. Nervously and doubtfully, Skep Dawder's long, narrow hand fluttered uncertainly at his right side. Hudson had in his left hand a magazine, which he flipped at the youth, on the instant the hand gripped a gun butt hidden inside a trousers band.

The thrown magazine struck the tiny wrinkled and malignant face. As the revolver hammer hooked in the belt, catching, Hudson sprang desperately and drove his fist into the fellow's body at the waist. Skep Dawder collapsed and Hudson snatched the weapon clear.

"My fist is better than this!"

Hudson spoke scornfully, for the weapon was a cheap .32 caliber bulldog model; pulling the pin, wrenching off the grip, jerking out the spring, cylinder pin and dismembering the revolver with his trap wiring pocket pliers, he threw the handful of parts into a corner.

A dapper, white collared, rather smallish man gathered up the rumpled paper and handed it to Hudson.

"Thank you, sir," the trapper said.

"My name's Thomaston," the little man beamed, drawing his card. "My office is just three doors to the north of the Mustang, the name on the window. I'm a real estater, if you happen to have any friends interested."

"I'll think it over," Hudson said curtly.

None of the others spoke or met his eyes. Instead all gazed reflectively at the two men lying on the floor, inert. Hudson wondered if they were badly hurt and, rubbing his aching fist, he didn't much care.

"Send for a doctor, O'Bale," he said sharply. "They're both out."

"Yes, sir!" O'Bale nodded. "They sure passed out!"

He waddled to the telephone just as a man with a badge on his shirt, a belt with a quick draw holster gun and a twenty-two inch nightstick entered. His bearing was important, dignified and official, his face bristling as he glared at the two prostrate men. He discovered the scattered revolver parts in the corner.

"What's up?" he demanded. "How come?"

"Black Joe Hipes looked for it," a portly man answered. "An' you can see, Marshal Weygan, he shore got it. Yas' indeed!"

"I'll say!" voices chorused enthusiastically.

"Skep insulted this gentleman, the Government trapper?" Weygan gazed thoughtfully at Hudson. "An' he sunk him, too—gun an' all?"

"He shore did," the heavy man declared admiringly. "Fist for both whacks, suh."

"A *fist* fight?" the city marshal asked incredulously.

"Not 'zactly a fight." The spokesman shook his head. "I'd call hit jes' natural retribution account of their not mindin'

their own business. Hipes come hailin' an' hellin', same as always when drunk. Ignored by Mr. Hudson, Joe interrupted his readin'—theh's the evidence of resentment. An' Skep'd likewise symptomed to interfere—"

"Reckon yo want to make a complaint against them, Mr. Hudson?" the marshal inquired.

"No, sir," Hudson refused. "I disturbed the peace myself, instead of complaining to you, asking your protection."

"Now ain't that jes' like a Down East Yankee?" the portly man exclaimed. "Thinkin' maybe he's violated himself—even in self-defense."

City Marshal Weygan shook hands with Hudson; the others were similarly demonstrative, except for several who seemed to be day dreaming. The arrival of a physician with a black bag was diverting. The doctor perceived his patients immediately and drew his stethoscope to sound both the prostrate men's hearts.

"Nothing but shock," he commented to the marshal. "Help me put them on a sofa in the ladies' parlor."

Several sprang to assist, and some one said—

"Say, Prof, what do you make of *him?*"

"Not so much!" Hudson heard the low answer. "He's bad—got to be watched, sure enough."

This was the view of those who had not been friendly and, nonplused, Hudson gave no sign of having heard.

CHAPTER V

THE BUSHWHACKER

HUDSON resumed his reading in the Mustang House lobby. No one disturbed him. In fact, whoever passed behind him as he sat with his feet on the window sill, tiptoed by, yet swung wide enough so that it was obvious they were being careful not to interrupt him. All over town the populace soon heard that the Government trapper had resented with his fists interference with his affairs; and a physician was having a real job restoring the objects of his resentment. Reading a magazine, Hudson chuckled.

After more than two hours, O'Bale came thumping downstairs and announced from the ladies' parlor that Black Joe Hipes had at last come to, snuffling and baffled, just unable to remember what had happened. But the hotel proprietor jeered the statement.

"Black Joe's just pretendin' he don't know what happened," O'Bale told the boys. "His face is cracked and swelled, and Doc says he's through dinin' on raw meat in favor of soup an' breakfast food mushes, on account of cracked bones. At least for the present, anyhow."

Listening to the gossip and comments, Kit Hudson learned that Black Joe was talked about freely, but no one more than mentioned Skep Dawder. Now and then some voice wondered "What'll Skep think?" And once Hudson heard a low voice remark—

"Skep must have been s'prised, dilly-dallyin' thataway!"

Presently, after nearly going to sleep, Hudson rose, stretched comfortably and told O'Bale he reckoned he would go to bed. With every one watching covertly, the proprietor conducted him upstairs.

Hudson found his room to be on the corner, with two windows. The mirror, was wiped off and the floor clean, freshly swept. The bureau drawers had been emptied of cigaret stubs, empty bottles and wadded newspapers. The Sons of Gideon Bible was laid on a clean doily on the dresser top, which was dusted nicely. His saddle bags were on the floor and when he sat down, the voices beneath were as audible as the barking of dogs around town. Things had been started which he knew were by no means finished, and he was kept awake long after he went to bed, listening and reflecting.

Not many were down to breakfast as early as Hudson. People who stay up late usually are not out at sunrise. Squarehead was a dull community,

gloomy as an abandoned town till mid-morning. At the railroad station the telegraph operator gave Hudson a quick glance which showed plainly she remembered him; from the expression in her eyes he surmised she had heard him talked about. Without a word she handed him a message from Superintendent Reed Worley, saying the requisition for supplies had been honored, and would be shipped, prepaid, during the day. The agent said a fortnight might elapse before they arrived at Squarehead.

"Hold them for me when they come," he said, rather curtly in her own manner, leaving.

He purchased the food supplies he would need for two weeks, and by ten o'clock he was driving his loaded packhorse southward. No one had mentioned either Black Joe or Skep Dawder that morning. In fact, he was treated on all sides to a show of diffidence. The bearing of clerks, store proprietors, bystanders, indicated that all knew about the difficulty of the previous evening.

At every crossroads the trail grew more indistinct, and five miles south a ridge of sod appeared between the wheel ruts. Hudson took his bearings by a flat topped butte, or mesa, heading for the sparkling white of the Bad Lands where the breaks spread across the southern horizon as he entered the long, deepening sag that pitched down into the Rascal River bottoms, just west of the bell shaped butte at the head of his own flat. His pilot mesa was half a mile or more to his right as he passed it.

He was startled by the crackling of a bullet passing near him, followed by a distant shot, and a splash of dust over to his left down the slope. A second shot was followed by the scream of a long rifle projectile tumbling through the air. This time the aim was better, the bullet whipping close to him. His horses leaped ahead, frightened by the dangerously close smack of the air behind the missile. Swinging down, Hudson snatched his carbine from its scabbard and lifted his binoculars from his chest to his eyes.

On the instant he saw a human figure darting along the side of the butte, and he emptied his carbine at the bushwhacker, smoking him with bullet splashes close to his heels till he disappeared around the south end of the tableland. Mounting, Hudson dashed in pursuit.

When he circled the butte he could see no sign of the miscreant, who must have hidden in one of the many drywash draws with which the surface of the rolling prairie ground was cut toward the west. At the ambush from which the shots had come, a cluster of mushroom rocks at the side of the mesa, he found four empty .32-40 high velocity shells. Pocketing them, he studied the lie of the land. From the elevation of perhaps a hundred feet, he could see that his direct route would have been down the line within two hundred yards of the toadstool stone formation.

Climbing to the mesa top, he looked into the basin where the bushwhacker had hidden, but saw no sign of him. After a two hour vigil he returned to his packhorse and, watching back over his shoulder, retired into the Rascal River bottoms, angry, alert and puzzled. He surmised that the shots had been fired to frighten him out of the country, though they had not gone far astray—no farther than a poor shot would have missed at that range.

The four empty .32-40 shells he had gathered each revealed a nick in the rim where the ejector had jerked into the metal, and the bullet swadge tip had been flattened where it lifted against the top of the chamber or struck the edge of the ejector slot. He saved them against a possible chance to make comparisons.

THAT night Hudson dreamed nightmares of evil import, but after a hearty breakfast the new day looked better. Catching one of his hobbled horses he started over his wild domain, obtaining bird's eye views from heights, and reading signs in draws and wherever sand, clay, muck of any kind took paw prints. Apparently

hundreds of animals ranged here, and he saw two blacktail and one Virginia deer, several badgers, ferret holes, beaver dams, muskrat burrows, mink runways at streams, and three otter slides. Coyote tracks were everywhere, and along the foot of several ledges in sandpatches were paw prints of innumerable bobcats. Lobo wolves were plenty, too . . .

He came to an alluvial fan out of a narrow drywash slot in a rough faced cliff. Coyotes and wildcats romped and played on this natural page of wild life literature. Gray wolves, too, had shambled across it, and deer regularly used the wash bottom as a runway going up on to a tableland to graze on curly grass.

But the tracks of five big lobos came down the creek fork and raced across the foot of the sand spread, galloping by about their own immediate business, whatever that was. Two of them threw themselves as they ran, rolling over and over, leaping to their feet without losing their stride, shaking the sharp crystals from their hair as they bounded. They all spread their toes wide and the loose particles cut away the caked mud and sweat from their paws. Following their leader, they kept on their way without a pause—big, swagger, and tireless, a compact and conspicuous pack whose farflung bounds and terrific energies were marked among their own kind—individualists, bullies, and proud.

Riding along that trail of big wolves on the romp, Hudson came to a patch of blue-black alkali, soft and putty-like, on which each bound left intaglios of perfect paw impressions. There were twenty paws, the largest set more than four inches across; but one of these was a half moon, the front cut square across, and its step was light, a mere steadying touch—not a weight bearing football.

A much smaller wolf, which seemed to have led the pack, since the tracks of the others followed, threw a left hind paw sidewise, scratching the surface three or four inches—an unmistakable limp, perhaps a hip broken by bullet or trap.

A third wolf gave an extra dig with his forepaws when he bounded, his nails scratching deep, an indication of superabundant energies. The fourth wolf gave a similar indication of eager strength, running five or six jumps at bounds of seven or eight feet, and then taking a twelve-foot bound. The fifth wolf ran behind the others, his trail crooked.

"Running faster but going so much farther he was always behind." Hudson grinned, remembering the excuse of a rider who lost a horse race.

Hudson gave the beasts names according to their tracks: Moon Foot, Bounder, Tardy, Slipper and Digger. He could see by their tracks that they had crossed a flat and stopped short at the mouth of a gulch, turning around and looking back. Across slopes and flats of open ground they spread wide, but romped or raced in single file in narrow coulees or where they crossed a stream.

The trapper studied the signs for significant things. They were outlaws, travelers, wandering whither they listed. He found where they had pulled down and devoured two deer within the past two weeks or so. In one place he found the velvet horns of a big white tail Virginia deer where it had been killed, cornered in a box cañon. A cow had been run over a cliff and eaten where she had fallen with her neck and back broken.

Here was wonderful country for a student trapper!

The wild life showed its distrust, but with no such frantic bursts of speed as that displayed where hunting is habitual. Jackrabbits, prairie chickens, and even a flock of late hatched black ducks barely moved out of Hudson's way, merely avoiding the hoofs of his mount. Looking over a divide, having removed his hat, he saw five antelope which he had not anticipated, as these open country creatures are especially sought by homesteaders. They bunched instantly with alarm, though only his head had appeared. They stood tense with anxiety for but a moment, and then they bounded away, flashing their alarm as their hoofs thudded

on the baked earth. Far rangers, they were forever hunted.

On the instant, three gray creatures started up from clumps of grass to look around, recognizing the warning signals. They were sleek, sneaking coyotes, which quickly discovered him and with sidewise bounds, looking over their shoulders, they fled circling, sniffing the breeze. Suddenly one of them straightened out along a mesa crest perhaps three hundred yards distant, silhouetted against the western sky.

"Why, you damn cur!" Hudson gasped. "And you haven't a tail, either!"

Throwing up his rifle, he emptied it in the effort to kill the animal, but his bullets merely tossed puffs of sand around the quarry. The coyotes all vanished and a minute or so later sharp yips of derision and alarm shrilled in the silence of the dunes. When these ceased, the bluejays appeared to jeer as they flickered like colored glass in the sunshine.

"Two of them had tails," Hudson muttered. "But damn the one that didn't."

A coyote, a prairie wolf, ought always to have a beautiful plume like others of the wolf breed, or for that matter, the foxes. He stood startled and troubled, his gaze resentfully sweeping this land of mysteries where assassin bullets might whisper to find him and where wolves, big lobos and coyotes, were some of them tailless. As he took his bearings by the great pilot butte now northeast of him, blue against the sky, he tried to reconcile his experience, his book learning and his superstitions . . .

CHAPTER VI

THE WHITE RAVEN

ARRIVING at his cabin, hobbling his mount and casting off the saddle gear, Kit Hudson rejoiced to be home instead of rolling up in his blanket in a hungry, perhaps dry, camp, out in the Bad Lands. He had come out upon the ridge where he had first seen the five bobtailed gray wolves. There, within a few hundred feet of his own camp he had lost the sense of direction, witnessed a mirage city in its magic, and entered environs so strange that he could not now, in his sober, deliberate senses explain the frame of mind from which he had escaped. He literally had not known where he was when a tossed pebble would have fallen nearly straight down into the yard of his cabin, possibly landing on its roof. In any wilderness such a thing could have happened, of course, but only to a tenderfoot, a stranger—or to a native under a spell.

He cooked and ate a hearty meal of venison broiled in a hot pan, potatoes sliced into simmering tallow and browned flour gravy. A gusty wind was blowing, eddying about. Increasing till ten o'clock, it settled into a pounding gale out of the east, and thereupon the walls of the cabin became vibrant, the ground throbbing. Passing in the storm, he heard shrieking wails the like of which he had never before heard, yet which he compared to a great ocean liner being warped into a Manhattan Island North River slip, shrill tugs piping and the huge fog horn growling and bellowing hoarsely in a chill, wintry norther. The memory sounds did not jibe with his position five hundred leagues inland, and he could nor reconcile his ideas with one another, even now.

Blowing out his light, he put a big shield before the fireplace, shading it, and rifle in hand he went outside to trace the source of the uproar. It would not do to leave these mysteries unexplained, if he could by investigation uncover the magic. Eddies of wind struck down the bluffs and cuffed him, but he could see nothing to throw light on the mystery; now the sound was like the voices of demons emerging bat-like from their caverns. Going down to the Rascal River bank, the cottonwood canopy sheltered him from the blasts. At the stream he felt the drag of the up-valley gale and, going with it, he drew near the source of the shrieks.

Opposite the foot of the flatiron island on which the fluted, bell shaped butte rose in the narrows, he found the drive of the wind so powerful that it carried the sand smoking into the narrows between the north and south bluffs converging there. The storm pulse was in long, swelling blasts, the shallow stream surface being whipped up into white fog, so tremendous was the pressure in the narrow slits through which the air jammed and spurted. Each gust, each blast gave its own sound. Deep tones united with shrill, whistling yells. Standing in the lee of a drift pile, Hudson gazed at the dimly visible spectacle, listening to the notes. He had to laugh.

"Now I know what a whistling butte is like!" He chuckled. "The east wind howls through the caves, caverns, wildcat holes and tunnels, every one a pipe with a voice! That's the Howling Butte they talk about in Squarehead and across the prairies!"

In the fine morning, recollection of the tailless coyote was exasperating. Hudson hesitated to write his observation in the record, for how could he explain what seemed a silly illusion? While cooking his breakfast he wrote down the various observations which did not make him question his own good sense. While thus engaged, he heard a low, piping, plaintive note.

Picking up his binoculars, he discerned a black flutter in the pale, dusty foliage of the yellow and green cottonwood tops. Then he saw a pearly white bird, as though some herring gull had come to visit him. Pulling down his glasses, he stared with his naked eyes, scowling and licking his lips nervously.

"Why, damn my eyes!" he exclaimed. "There's the white raven they tell about with the werwolves!"

Whether with open gaze or binoculars, he saw a pink eyed, snow-white raven, its bill and legs glossy black. Of all the wise creatures recognized by the human predecessors of civilized peoples, none rivals in ominous forebodings and cunning the snowy raven of superstitious traditions, yet which biologists would have students believe is an inbred freak. To nothing does folklore ascribe greater powers of black magic.

Hudson leveled his binoculars and sedulously noted every detail, the hop of the white raven, its querulous pipings to the normal black companions, its extraordinary size compared to its fellows. He had hung a deer's backbone in the cottonwoods, and he had wired up shanks, kidney fat, and other venison wastes; to these tidbits and feasts came the flock of ravens, cautiously, circumspectly and with much argument among themselves.

Now and again one of the blacks would dart from leafy security and, perching on one of the pieces, wrench loose a chunk and flap hastily back to the shelter of the canopy of trees, while less daring birds walked sidewise on limbs or tried to share in the loot of their more courageous companions. First one, then another took a chance.

FOR A LONG time the white one hung back. A great, beautiful bird, his eyes shone like rubies and his ebony bill and legs were in wonderful contrast to his pearly plumage. Watching his mates of normal shade, after a long time, the albino decided that all was well and flew down with fine dignity, coolly to pick away pieces of the tallow and red meat. The other ravens which had been dashing in and out presently circled nearer and scattered out on the food. Among themselves they sometimes disputed the possession of a perch, but none tried to share the deer spine with the big white raven.

A black one discovered the deer head, uttered an enthusiastic pipe and began to feed on the brains through a hole which Hudson had punched in the skull. Evidently exasperated by the tiny bits of the choice particles he was able to dig out, he began to scold and a female ruffled up her feathers when she came to try her bill. The indignation drew the albino's interest and attention; he suddenly sailed to the head, knocked the two birds from their

perches and took possession, which the others did not dispute.

Hudson was nonplused. He recalled investigation of scientists into the strange cults and the mystic lore of enchantments, wers, leopard people, black magic and mystic arts. He had read accounts of wolves that changed to men, and men who changed to wolves, all the odd phases that are linked with human animals. The quirks of the human mind which believed in such fancies had been studied by learned psychologists, whose examinations into things mankind knows have revealed such strange and absurd contradictions.

Now Hudson knew tailless wolves, heard them go by in full chase and had learned their tracks, as individuals. He discovered them with a buck deer at bay in the stillwater above Howling Butte narrows, and by a nearly full moon, through his binoculars, watched the rascals surround the stricken beast, hold it, leap in and nip it, and then with a savage rush hamstring the left hindleg. The next instant the pack tore their victim to pieces.

"If I had my gun," he grunted, adding, "Too far to hit them, anyhow."

When the beasts had feasted, they drew back from the dismembered skeleton and, licking themselves, grunted with surfeit and then scattered around to lie out on the flat. Instead of curling down in a compact huddle in the way of coyotes and the lesser dogs of civilization, these scoundrels sprawled wide, stretching at ease, confident, swagger and snoring.

There they were, Moon Foot, Slipper, Digger, Bounder and Tardy! Not one had a tail. Hudson could tell them by their size as they were spread out on the sand after their gorge, stirring uneasily in their dreams.

When the moon swung around till they were in the shadows, he could only just discern them like dim brush splotches. They were dreaming, twitching, whistling and even loping as they lay on their sides, squealing as in a race.

Toward dawn they stirred uneasily, sitting up heavily to yawn, spraddling to drink copiously. Snarling at one another, they snapped their jaws noisily, stretching and writhing beneath their grisly hides; and when false dawn flitted across the skies, the wretches began to slink along in single file until with increasing bounds they flickered into one of the draws where they vanished, knowing better than to remain in so open a place.

Stiff, chilled, weary with his vigil, the observer returned to his cabin, carrying many notes scrawled hurriedly on pages of a stenographer's pencil book. After breakfast he transcribed every note and observation at length for his loose-leaf typewritten account. It seemed like writing about ghosts, or wraiths, and for once he sympathized with the remote peoples who walked in superstition and terror of the black arts.

The pack of bobtailed wolves was fantastic, any way he regarded them. Gray wolves, in points they differed from the lobo in common practises. Instead of curling up to sleep, they sprawled wide where they bedded down. Dogs before a safe hearth sprawl in the same way, but when in the wilds canines begin to huddle down to meet the exigencies of small shelters, cold winds, and eternal perils. Horses which depend on speed for escape in the deserts stretch out in the same way, and so do some of the bigger, scrappier cats.

Hudson wanted no visitors at his cabin. He came and went, winding and skirting about, never twice in the same way, since to walk a few times in the same line would mean leaving a plain trail in loose loam or soft ground, which a close observer would instantly notice. Even if a discoverer should be innocent in intention, the rumor of the Government trapper's retreat was not one he cared to have winging to the ears of the man who had shot at him, or come to the men he had so thoroughly humiliated in Squarehead.

Thus he gained acquaintance with the fascinating Bad Lands. In a week, by feeding the creatures which came around his cabin, Kit Hudson established himself

as an innocent wildling of the Bad Lands, along with those less innocent. He took pains to cultivate friendships and associations among the animals which dwelt around in the flats and broken lands, doing no shooting anywhere in his cabin's vicinity. What venison and grouse he needed for food he killed miles distant, bringing the meat in packs to fool the wild spectators, who appeared little acquainted with the duplicity of man.

WHEN he rode north for his outfit which had been shipped from headquarters, he felt that he knew the lie of the land pretty well, and he was beginning to feel that he could put down traps and bushwhack along runways with some hope of tripping the heels of the strange beasts around which had grown so fantastic a reputation. Instead of starting in the morning, he waited till night fell and then, with scuffle shoes on his saddle horse, he circled wide and made his way to Squarehead. Perhaps the bushwhackers knew from the express agent that he would be coming back in ten days or so. Miles away he took off the track hiders and, packing them in his duffle, he rode into town from the north and dropped his saddle at the Mustang House.

His arrival obviously startled most of the patrons, who were chiefly the crowd of the previous visit. Among these loomed a man of medium height, with brown whiskers, and sparkling blue eyes. Hudson remembered this man, though till this moment he had forgotten him. Around him was a group that included Skep Dawder, and obviously they were linked in a common bond of some kind, though no one of them resembled another in type or kind, the brown whiskered *hombre* having a trim and conspicuous alertness that belonged, in spite of his home town clothing, to metropolitan or at least cultured conditions. Skep was surly and glowering, but the leader gripped his forearm and the gunman backed up.

"Hello, trapper," some one greeted, indicating a friendliness, or respect.

"Howdy—" Hudson nodded, uncertain who among the bystanders had spoken to him.

Breakfast was ready, and the arrival from the Bad Lands saw oatmeal and milk, hotcakes, sage sausage, good coffee coming in plenty.

"Mornin', Hudson," Prairie Catone the waitress greeted him, but another girl served his dishes.

Skep Dawder followed from the hotel office, walking slowly with a twist to his thin figure. Hudson watched him and the youth stopped short, hesitating.

"Say, Skep," Hudson said, his voice friendly as, rising and smiling, he confronted the youth, "are we friends? How about it?"

Surprised and nonplused, Dawder gave a sidelong glance at the whiskery man who was just ahead of him.

"Yes," that man said, obviously, though almost inaudibly.

"I got what was comin', prob'ly," Skep said gruffly, taking the right hand whose doubled fist had disabled him at that other meeting between the two.

"I don't want any hard feelings," Hudson said. "I'm friendly, peaceable—and if you have to do for me, don't do it with that popgun you had that other time. A man hates to linger along if he's got to be shot, you know. When you kill a man, do a clean job of it."

"Yeh—!" Skep grinned with appreciation of the joke. "That's so!"

Chuckles rippled around the restaurant. Skep had come clear at the county court on three killing charges—self-defense, lack of incriminating evidence and so on. Kit Hudson thus established himself as a humorist of the right sort, and now if it was necessary to kill him, it would be just too bad that he needed it.

The situation was somewhat clarified. Some of the people seemed to like Hudson; some didn't. The Government trapper wasn't particularly welcome, at the same time he probably had as much right to be there as the next one, come to think about it. Quite a few were neutral. Some were uneasy and dubious. Covert,

watchful scrutiny held him in its sneering attention. Some of the sidelong glances reminded him, somehow, of the five tailless wolves, an odd and yet not wholly unreasonable fancy. A worried man and a coyote running away look over their shoulders in the same alert manner.

The bewhiskered man had an odd nickname; Booksey, the boys called him. His voice was low, crisp, incisive. He talked little, but his remarks satisfied his companions as he ate—slowly. He held his oatmeal spoon correctly. He used his knife and fork properly. He sipped his spring water coffee with appreciation of its flavor.

Hudson lingered over the meal with pleasure. Living on his own cooking, he rejoiced in this meal he had not himself prepared. O'Bale came to the dining room door and called to Prairie Catone, saying—

"Tell that Gov'ment trapper Miss Keynote, at the railroad, seen him coming by, and wants us to tell him she wants to see him."

"Yes, suh," the young woman replied, glancing from her employer to the man at the table who could not help having heard that call, which could have been addressed to himself as well as not.

Hudson gave no sign that the oblique address had reached his ears. The waitress came to his chair and repeated O'Bale's words. Hudson thanked her with a quick smile. A little later, when he had finished eating, he sauntered slowly to the desk where he paid for his meal.

"That's so you'll know I won't run out on you," Hudson told O'Bale. "I know you'd suffer a lot, losing four-bits."

O'Bale started to speak, but grunted acknowledgment instead and Hudson went to the post office where he found a bundle of mail. At the railroad station Miss Keynote, the agent, welcomed him with a slight smile and searching glance.

"Your shipment has come," she said.

"Where could I hire a truck?" Hudson asked. "I want to drive it myself."

"Why you could, if you wanted to—" she hesitated. "But, you see, there's a rumor—two boys were hunting over south. They claim they saw some one trying to shoot you."

"What of it?" he asked, quietly. "What's that to do with my driving the truck with my outfit on it?"

"Why, you'd have to stay in the road—down the line," she said. "Past the homesteads—the deserted ones."

"And I'd be an easy mark sitting on a truck?" he asked.

"Yes, exactly," she nodded.

After all she was human, not as aloof as she had been on his previous visits to the office.

"I'm glad of the witnesses," he said, his tone changing. "I wasn't going to mention it. I don't know why they shot at me. In the moonshine feud country at the head of the Cumberland I heard of such things. I didn't expect it out here. Whatever happened—"

"They said you were riding along and some one opened on you at the Butte," she said. "You swung down and whipped a magazine full at the killer, and drove him to cover. Then you chased him, but he'd sneaked it in a draw and you couldn't find him. That was bold!"

"The only safe way," he said. "The only way to mind my own business that I could think of. I headed right in—that's all."

"It worked about Black Joe Hipes—he's moved," the girl said. "He didn't wait for his jaws to heal. Perhaps he left the country. Skep Dawder's different. Look out for him. You know now there's plenty wrong with this country, but no one knows what it is. Bad actors, too many killings, and the homesteaders terrorized. On top of all that are the—"

"Wolves without tails?" Hudon inquired as she hesitated.

"Yes," she said seriously. "Wolves without tails—weres! I don't believe humans can change to animals, do you? Or animals to humans?"

"Sure I don't," he replied cheerfully. "But I've seen the bobtails, myself."

"And werwolves have no tails!"

"Exactly," Hudson grinned. "I've

been looking around for a black cat with a white tip."

"What for?"

"Why, if I could take seven white hairs from a black cat's tail, blow them straight up, and then write magic words with the plume from a white raven's tail, wers couldn't hurt me—not a bit."

She laughed, though wryly.

"Perhaps I can find a black cat—" she sighed. "Black art is fascinating to read about, but it gives me the creeps to think about it."

"Before I try silver bullets, I'm going to lay for 'em with standard .25-35's," Hudson declared stoutly.

"The gunsmith has laid in a supply of silver bullets," Miss Keynote said. "I understand he is doing quite a trade in those cartridges."

"Is that so?" Hudson smiled. "Maybe I had better be on the safe side. I'll get some silver bullets, for luck."

"This is new country," she said. "There are a few natives, old-timers here; mostly it has been settled by superstitious aliens. They see strange things, and report them here in town."

"I'm working as if those bobtails were ordinary wolves," Hudson answered. "My outfit there contains traps, hardware—everything. The way to get the things down the line bothers me, now. I'm going right to work."

"If you go out in the truck they can follow your tracks," the girl warned him. "They just mustn't know you went in it. Slip away at night—that's the only way. I can bring the truck here. I covered the shipment against being recognized. Your camp is hidden—keep it secret."

He stared at her, surprised to find such an ally. She smiled at him in such a way as to make him understand she was backing up a move of the Government, not a mere worker. Hudson flushed at her silent rebuke. An express and telegraph company employee would take that attitude, of course. Criminal bands are enemies of all the great organizations, including that of the nation and State.

Going back to the hotel lobby, Hudson opened the letters which he had received in the mail. One was addressed in lead pencil and when he looked at the postmark he read "Sickwolf". On a piece of cheap pad paper he found printed in faked illiteracy:

> say misTer govment trapper here ain't any country for no spies ner detectifs. This is a free land an don't never fergit it. this is Yore move so git going pronto wich is best blieve me.
> —Witchy

Sharp eyes were watching him. Surveillance had not ceased for a moment. His guise as Government trapper was mistrusted. He was accused of being a detective, and he knew from this that people with that idea who wrote anonymous letters of warning were fearful—and with reason.

Sickwolf was nearly a hundred miles west and at the edge of the headwater Bad Lands of Rascal River, off the railroad south of Rascal Cap Springs.

Hudson pushed the letter into his pocket and continued to read his mail, pondering on the name "Witchy". In all the warning, that word seemed to him to be most significant—yet, just why, he could not be sure.

CHAPTER VII

BY RIGHT OF CAPTURE

THE MORE Kit Hudson thought about the treatment accorded him, the angrier he grew. Sent by the Government at the urgent request of the delegate from the small ranchers who had lost stock to a band of outlaw wolves, his chief problem had proved to be human hatred that did not stop short of attempted murder.

Now that the traps and other equipment had arrived, Hudson felt better. He had spent a valuable and interesting ten days studying the country and considering the best sets to use in ridding the land of its stock raiders. At the same time, lying awake, he remembered and worried about the attempt to bushwhack

him at what was called Signal Butte, long a landmark for prairie travelers in the open or Bad Lands country. Whether the shots at him were a warning or a real attempt to kill, they meant trouble.

He must keep his camp hidden, carry his outfit to it secretly, and avoid human miscreants while seeking to destroy the predatory beasts. He knew that Superintendent Worley would recall him if it became known that local authorities could not or would not protect a Government representative; there were plenty of other regions where a national trapper would be welcomed without bothering in a land where ignorant natives did not appreciate the honor and blessing of having a paid expert to handle a gray wolf menace.

Later he went to eat at the Mustang House. Opposite him sat the man he now knew by the nickname of Booksey, whose correct table manners the natives did not resent as they had the Government trapper's.

After supper Hudson went to the stable to make sure his horse, Blight, was all right. The hostler was a flat faced, rather undersized man with a direct stare and a great liking for animals. He had given Blight a good rubdown and fed him grain as well as hay. Hudson was pleased and turned to go back to the hotel. As he did so he caught a glimpse of some one covertly watching from out front and, quickly stepping into a shadow, Hudson edged through a side door.

Circling the open corral, the trapper cut across a string of vacant lots, soon arriving at the rear of the Mustang House where he went up an outside flight of stairs, and in his room he unbuckled his rifle boot and put a handful of ammunition into his pocket. Hesitating over his revolver and .22 automatic pistol in their belt holsters, finally he left them where they were. He could not draw with a Western bad man and he had not yet reached the point where he could convince himself he ought to wear weapons for self-defense.

Apparently no one had seen him. Leaving his room noiselessly, he saw no watcher, and rejoiced when the outside stairway did not creak. Indeed, O'Bale did not have squeaking hinges or betraying floor boards, being a hotel proprietor of great consideration regarding certain minor points. He even had gun cleaners and grease for patrons.

In the rear yard Hudson edged around the beams of light from the windows, headed across the open acre behind the old stable now used as a garage by the hotel and approached the corner of a high board fence around the yard of the hardware, paint and crockery store next to the hotel. By the clock he had forty minutes to train time, and he did not know just when he could have his truck and load his outfit.

Rounding the fence corner, some instinct bade him stop short and turn around to watch his back track like a rabbit in a runway. An instant later he heard soft footsteps and scratching of dry weeds along the pathway he had followed; a stooping figure swung incautiously around the corner to where Hudson stood with his carbine rifle held ready. He struck with the butt and the pursuer went down like a log.

From the man's hand fell a big revolver. Thereupon Hudson, the squeamishness he had felt all gone, took his victim's belt and holster to buckle them about his own waist. Then with a piece of white cord—trotline, such as most trappers carry in a coil—he firmly bound the man's wrists, elbows and ankles, and from the fellow's neckerchief he made a safe, secure gag.

Leaving the man lying against the high fence, Hudson hurried, skulking on his own way, playing Indian and guessing at many possible reasons for that attempt to keep track of his movements. In the gloom he had been unable to identify the man he had knocked out, but he was one of the Mustang Hotel hangers-on, a group which obviously had it in for him.

Careful to watch back and all around, Hudson zigzagged alone, but no one else bothered him. Striking the railroad at the cattle and sheep loading pens, he followed the tracks to the big tank on its

heavy timbers which supplied water for the stock and locomotives. Here he sat in the deepest gloom to wait for the train, whose headlight he could see far to the east, coming in twenty or thirty minutes late.

The revolver and leather equipment he had confiscated were splendid, the weapon having superb balance, the holster wonderfully slick, worked for a fast draw. Hudson had never pulled a gun from a scabbard oiled for "business," when a slight drag might mean the difference between living and dying. When he lifted the revolver he felt the slick of perfect attention, dressing the leather and shaping the open holster as a mold to fit the weapon.

THE THUNDERING westbound Silver Bow Limited drew near with increasing throbbing and a mile of blue-white headlight glare shining along the vibrating rails. Pounding past the water tank, it came to a stop at the platform, two commercial travelers' trunks crunching on the cinders and a passenger disembarking.

The trunks were heaved into a delivery truck and then the station lamps were dimmed. Five minutes later Hudson discovered in the deep shadow of the station a small truck, and Miss Keynote noiselessly pushed back the door into the freight house.

The outfit had come in sixty pound packages, convenient for transporting on pack horses. They were made up in the snug, tight, skilful way of Government shipments, and in a few minutes Hudson had loaded them into the truck. He stood in the gloom of the station shed, hesitating. Miss Keynote had helped him beyond estimate, and he tried to tell her so.

"If I could think of some way to repay you," he exclaimed.

"You might invite me to ride out with you," she suggested, smiling. "You have no idea how terribly monotonous it is here, usually."

"Why, that's adding more favors to repay," Hudson exclaimed, inspired.

She laughed and, having locked the doors and tried them all, she took the place beside him at the wheel. She knew more about driving the truck than he did and, circling around, they headed north; but after a mile they turned to the west, drove down the line and came into the Rascal River roadway south of town. When they were over the first swell in the rolling lands the girl turned on the headlights.

Prairie owls rose from the roadway ahead of them. A jackrabbit dashed along the right of way with prodigious leaps, its shadow falling grotesquely on the ground. A young coyote stopped them, standing and staring into the blinding glare, his eyes like marvelous emeralds. A rattlesnake lifted its head two hundred yards ahead and its eyes shone like golden topaz.

"Anyhow," Miss Keynote said presently, "that coyote had a tail."

"Just what I was thinking," Hudson admitted. "What are you doing out in the prairies? Railroading here seems like a man's job."

"Too dull and commonplace in the Milwaukee office," she said. "Not much happens in Squarehead, but when it does it is interesting. I've a pull higher up."

"The spirit of adventure—" he thought, aloud.

"A girl homesteading over south used to be telephone central in Sioux Falls," the station agent said. "A school teacher in the Rolling Stones district. If you've noticed the girl waiting on the tables in the Mustang—her father's people would give her a home in Boston—gladly."

"Prairie Catone?" he asked.

"Oh, you know her," Miss Keynote said. "But of course, you would . . ."

"Oh—I—" Hudson stammered.

They hit a bump in the road that lifted the truck load all clear and made him grab the side of his seat. In silence they rolled down to where the trail began to meander. Signal Butte, over at the right, loomed dark and high. She came to a halt.

"Which way?" she asked.

"Perhaps I'd better drive," Hudson suggested. "An old wagon road swings into a dry wash ahead, but I think it would be better to keep on the prairie down to the bluffs. I can lower my duffle to the river bottoms, behind some buffalo brush there. Then I can come any time with my packhorses and carry it to camp, or distribute the traps over my routes."

"Going to run lines?" she asked.

"You know trapping?"

"I'm from northern New Hampshire," she said. "Some good fur there."

"I'm going to work through the Bad Lands," Hudson explained. "That's for the big lobos, chiefly. No telling where they'll strike."

Rocking and bouncing along over the sod, the machine was surprisingly soon at the brink of the bluffs above the Howling Butte on Rascal River.

Hudson dropped his packs on the incline and they rolled to bury themselves in the brush, carrying down a slide of loose sand. In a few minutes he had securely cached his shipment and they were on their way back to Squarehead, circling wide and following for a time the tracks made by the Doukhobors who had gone howling and wailing by that night when the trapper had heard them.

"Where is your camp?" Miss Keynote asked. "I'd like to know where to fly a signal if anything breaks that you ought to hear. Besides, if you are keeled over you deserve at least a burial."

"You think so? Thank you," Hudson exclaimed. "Perhaps it wouldn't so much matter, after all. Stick a flag on a pole anywhere along the edge of this high bluff and I'd see it. Or on Pilot Signal Butte, either. My camp isn't in sight, but it's over against the breaks on the south side, hard to find at the back of the top bench. With these enemies prowling, I'd hate to have anyone know where I'm located."

"They've been asking which way you travel," she said. "Booksey seems to be the ring leader. His reading is all highbrow, one of the proofs that culture covers some pretty bad men."

RETURNING along a section line trail to a township monument, they struck the highway they had followed south. Turning off their headlights, they circled Squarehead to the east, crossed the railroad at a section road five miles out, and turned the lights on again as they proceeded southward. Leaving the truck at the junk yard where Miss Keynote had borrowed it, they strolled to her boarding house.

Hudson returned to the place of his encounter with the armed stranger and found the man conscious but still helpless. He secured the truck again, blindfolded the fellow and loaded him into it, driving around blocks to confuse him; then he drove him fifteen miles north of town into the Creeping River Bad Lands, crossing that stream and carrying him on to another creek fork. Hudson unloaded his prisoner, cut the lines and said:

"It's a nice walk to Squarehead from the Rascal. On the way you'd better decide whether you want to mess up with me or mind your own business, after this."

Having implanted the idea that the victim was thirty-odd miles south of where he thought, Hudson left him to read the stars and sunrise.

Despite the driving and work, he was in the Mustang House before dawn. At his door he listened to card players at the rear. Beyond a partition he could hear the low sounds of many people—sibilant voices, scuffling, clink of glasses. More were there than were usually down in the hotel lobby.

"Your play, Hipes," some one said.

The bully was there!

When Hudson lighted his lamp he saw that his notebook which he had left on the dresser had been turned over. A partly burned matchstick was on the floor. Some one had looked into his saddlebag pockets, but nothing had been taken. He hid the revolver he had captured and put the belt into a bundle. Locking the door, he went to bed, weary and relaxed, yet bothered by fleeting thoughts and fancies.

In the morning, soon after daybreak, Hudson was downstairs. Four cowmen who had brought in a drive of beef cattle were eating breakfast—going to ship that day. None of the hangers-on was out so early. Prairie Catone gave him a sharp, smiling glance and when she brought him a dish of oatmeal and a pitcher of milk and took his order for flapjacks and sausage, she asked him in a low, casual voice—

"Up late?"

"Not so very; why?" he asked.

"Wondering," she said. "Guessing about none of my business."

Trying to find out what was on her mind did him no good.

"Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies," she said frankly; but her expression gave serious meaning to her words. She was anxious, but dared not talk.

After paying his bill, he went down the street with his saddle bags, rifle and a bundle of supplies, which covered his real object in coming to town. Having taken out his horse, he mounted and rode off across country toward the southeast as long as he was in sight of the town, holding his course till he could swing out of view of the homesteader cabins toward his Howling Butte neighborhood. He rode down into the Rascal River bottoms below the big beaver dam and then headed up to his own cabin. Taking his horses, he rode up to where he had rolled his outfit shipment down the slide bank bluffs and carried the bundles to his hiding place.

Five dozen wolf traps, and ten dozen assorted coyote traps, double spring and kangaroo jumps were the business end of his hardware. There were extra chains and grapples, stake springs, wires for snaring, specialties and experimental materials. One bundle contained poisons, buckskin gloves, a case of scent baits and other accessories. One package contained a whole line of assorted traps for the capture of bait, table, pelt and other animals. He even had a line of bird traps which could be used for plunging hawks, owls, and other nuisances, as well as bird lime and other things a good trapper could use to advantage. Some of these would be fine to use in fooling ravens, crows, shrikes and other meat birds. Five No. 5 traps for black bears were extra in case he needed them.

CHAPTER VIII

TRAPS

BRIEF as had been Kit Hudson's sojourn in the Rascal River basin, he had discerned the main features of the territory and examined innumerable details.

The trapper had seen tailless gray wolves at the flat below Howling Butte on the first evening of his arrival. Now the strange beasts reappeared in fourteen days. Hudson knew that mink, pekan, ermines, skunks and other weasels make fourteen day circuits and he tried to reconcile the circuits with the moon. Probably the fourteen day period was something to work on, even though he knew the pack might sometimes remain in one locality a day or two. Eccentricities and vagaries could mean little to him, but what ruins any quarry is a habit or fixed idea in dealing with them. Brushing aside the human animal, the werwolf foolishness, Hudson sought established wolf characteristics in the outlaw beasts. He searched to find a place where they passed, if not every trip around, then several times annually. He hunted for crossings, runways, old signs with fresh ones, yet leaving no indication of his own passing to arouse the curiosity or suspicion of the pack.

Always they came to the sand dunes, west of his camp, spreading their toes as they romped in it, cutting the dirt from their paws, polishing their nails, rolling over and over to work the sand through their hair, dusting themselves, thoroughly enjoying their dry bath. Then they were reported regularly west of Squarehead, and again at Tinpans, where they attacked Bud Y. Bersch stock—not to mention the robbery of his commissary. Exact dates were important in ascertaining

the direction of their circuit—probably it would be like the hands of a watch, so that if they went north from the sand dunes, they would swing past Tinpans, and this would give them a southerly course into the Rascal Bad Lands somewhere to the east of Hudson's camp, probably forty or fifty miles distant. But he wasn't sure; he must find out.

These wolves were perverts. Thoroughly healthy wolves, physically, would scorn sheep, cattle, horse meat, preferring the more agile rabbits, rodents, wild birds, and even mice, gophers and other feral game rather than the tainted meat of creatures beholden to mankind, domesticated and only too easy to destroy. But this pack of raiders included obvious cripples. Unable to catch quick prey, they had developed mentally to an extraordinary degree, and turned to the easy victims of bands, herds and flocks, driven by extremes of hunger to fill in their meals more and more by attacks on ranchers' property.

Accordingly Hudson made a dead set to learn exactly with what he was coping. The homesteaders might be Russian Doukhobors, transplanted Black Forest woodsmen, farmers from mid-European plains, uneducated, ignorant, superstitious according to Old World traditions; but a blight had fallen upon their domestic beasts, some utterly disappearing, some cruelly cut down with torn throats, bitten sides and hamstrung legs—the fangs of a grisly pack only too certain. A trapper could not putter with guesses in such conditions. The problem was to put down four square inches of trap pan on ten thousand square miles, where one of those brutes would land upon it, right.

He found a river fork over south of the Rascal River, where a wide valley swept northward to a prairie divide. Here high and rugged Bad Lands gave nearly impassable gulches and a far flung labyrinth of blind cañons and valleys filled with brush in thick tangles. Much game lived there. He saw a score or more of coyotes in a morning. He shot prairie chickens. He even killed three wild geese which he surprised in a long stillwater caused by a beaver dam. And here he found a place where the pack had gone through four or five times and left their tracks, all heading northward, some of the tracks being old, baked in the clay which had been softened by the spring thaws, and then sun hardened by the summer months.

According to that, if they circled with the sun, these wolves would come south to the eastward, and he should be able to find their tracks along the Rascal River. And according to the map that would be over at Waterholes, the county seat, which had been founded where the Old Emigrant Trail pulled up out of the great marsh sloughs—tens of thousands of acres of alkali pools and muck.

The fresh water, the relief from mosquitoes, the rest from salt slush where the wagon trains emerged again on hard ground in firm prairie brought the homeseekers to a pause, repairing, resting, recuperating. And Hudson surmised that the werwolves would follow down the line of the marshes for a change of diet—and perhaps over there he could find a good place to make a few spot sets, hoping to trip the heels of one or other of the domestic animal raiders. At least, he would learn their habits.

Thus, with his campaign outlined, he drew on a pair of green deer skin moccasins, with the hair outside, and in the Bad Lands Pass south of the sand dunes, he ran out a string of four sets of five traps each. No use to put down a bait of any kind. These brutes killed all their own meat—would go hungry a week rather than go near game a bullet or other animals had killed.

He hid traps in the narrows between sage bushes over which a wolf would leap, but around which other animals were apt to walk. He put traps, wrapped in soft buckskins that had been weathered for days and nights in the wind, where a wolf might run along in the edge of loose sand, beneath which was firm clay footing for claws to dig in. He found a round narrow knob on top of which were many paw prints, as if the outlaw band climbed there

to look around, to howl and to play.

HE STRUNG traps for more than twenty miles south and east from the Rascal River sand dunes to trap wolves which were killing domestic animals forty miles or so to the north in the Tinpans and Creeping River country. And miles distant from the steel he laid down, the jaws held open by pan dogs, he put out asafetida, anise, oil of rhodium, fish oil, beaver musk, skunk sulphur, hoarhound, lavender, peppermints and other flavors with sugar, candy, honey, seeking the sweet tooth of a gray wolf in the hope of thus betraying a scoundrel into destruction.

Once he had learned these wolves made a regular circuit he had a definite fact from which to start a genuine foundation for his information. Whenever he noted any peculiarity of the pack or the individual wolves, as that Slipper was a female and nearly always ran in the lead and the burly Moon Foot was second, while Bounder and Digger, no matter how fast they were traveling, would throw themselves rolling over and over in loose sand, he wrote the observation down in his "Wolf Book." So he accumulated facts by the dozens, oddities, eccentricities, commonplaces, details—the ways that were peculiar, and the habits they shared with other gray wolves, even with coyotes and foxes.

Once he made a set he kept away from it. To cover his rounds, he would ride to the top of a bluff or knob a quarter of a mile distant, from which he could survey the group of traps in their cover. Part of his art was not to catch coyotes, bobcats, and the ordinary, normal wolves. One of his most elaborate and hopeful sets was in a gorge a hundred feet deep through which the pack had run. Here at a narrows all five of the beasts had leaped over a buffalo berry bush, landed on a lodged cottonwood snag and then jumped more than ten feet to a bare, sandy place among a tumult of rough cobbles. In that nearly four-foot circle of paw pocked loose sand, Hudson put down five No. 415 traps, burning grapples on long chains under each one.

Every trap was wrapped in soft chamois, so the sand would not get under the pans. When he had replaced the sand over the sets, he poured it from a cottonwood scoop, making pawprints with a wolf paw he carried for the purpose. When he moved away he stepped only on boulders with his green deer skin moccasins. Of all his sets this one, he would have said, was the likeliest, and on the second week after he put it down, when he looked from the top of the bluffs a hundred yards distant and a hundred feet higher, two of the traps had been lifted out of their beds and his heart bounded with exultation.

This victim had scrambled northward and when the trapper came down into the gorge quarter of a mile beyond, a gray wolf was entangled in some bushes by the two drags, of four claws each. He had a trap on each forepaw, a huge, clumsy beast with high, humped shoulders. For a minute Hudson thought he had old Moon Foot, but after killing the animal the paws showed this fellow was just one of the Bad Lands nondescripts, his stomach full of berries, roots dug in a beaver meadow, and a lot of snail shells—just about the same line of food a skunk would eat.

Hudson replaced the traps but the wolf tragedy, he feared, would spoil the place as a chance at the wer pack, although he brushed off the tracks and as much as possible erased the signs of distress left by the victim in his dash along the bottom.

The big pack came through four days later. They had fed on a maverick about seven miles down the line and then slept scattered around a cottonwood bottom, which showed it was a night kill. By day they would hunt brush and draws for concealment. Rested, no longer hungry, just on the romp in restless curiosity, they came into the narrows, bounding along in wild exuberance. Bounder and Digger rolled over a dozen times in one long, narrow acre of dry sand wash. Slipper

turned back suddenly and threw herself into Moon Foot, and the two had rolled around and scrambled about in a mock fight, jumping up and racing on their way. They came in full chase along the gorge bottom, making long leaps, and Slipper had stopped short of the trap set by nearly two hundred yards, going up a slide, back and forth—for what Hudson could not tell except that some autumn flowers overhung there, rankly odorous.

Moon Foot was surging along, leaped to the take-off, arched over the bush, hit on the cottonwood—and then landed on his side at the edge of the sand patch. The mark of his shoulder was plain in the print. He had flung himself sidewise while still in the air. All the pack had stopped, then circled around, creeping on tiptoes. They had turned their backs to the traps and pawed gravel—at least three had—in a terrific shower and the pans which six or seven ounces would have sprung were set down by stones the size of goose eggs.

There all five traps were with the yellow chamois caught in the jaws. The pack had gone on. Half a mile beyond, the trapper found where they had walked, not galloped, around black alkali, and he could see that the nervous beasts had scratched the surface with a single toe-nail; and in one place all five had jumped, three to the left and two to the right, their paws sliding in a moist yellow clay at a bank ooze spring, all alarmed.

The wolves knew a trapper was after them now. In their own private runway, which an intruding sloven gray wolf had followed to his doom—meant for them—they had come upon a spot set of five traps. The days and nights when they could romp carelessly through the Bad Lands fastnesses were ended, and they knew it. Three miles farther on the tracks of the pack vanished from their usual route.

Circling to see what they had done, Hudson swung wide but found no sign of the wolves that afternoon. He camped that night in a draw with good water, and on the following morning five miles west of their customary route he found where the pack had headed west through a range, walking one behind the other, mincing along and every once in awhile one or another had bounded up or jumped to one side, startled and alarmed. They came into the sand dunes in the Rascal basin more than ten miles west of where they usually did, but coming back northeast, they had struck into the bottoms above the Howling Butte, hardly a mile from Hudson's camp. They knew steel traps, of course, for all their tracks showed the marks of steel jaws they had experienced.

The trapper wondered if they had not known he was so near. He went to his cabin, turning his saddle horse, Blight, loose on the river bottoms. As it was only a little after midday he went over into the valley where he had left his two packhorses hobbled.

What he found left not the least doubt that the werwolves knew where and just who he was. They had torn down and pulled to pieces one of his animals. They had gorged on the soft, fat horse. Then they had sneaked away, leaving some time the previous night while he slept in the country south, studying their ways!

"The sons of guns!" he gasped. "They came to take a whack back at me—the scoundrels!"

CHAPTER IX

THE WOLF CIRCUIT

WITH his trapping campaign under way, Hudson gave scant thought to the human enemies he had made in Squarehead. The raids by the wolf pack were linked in the superstitious minds of the homesteaders with the disappearance of cattle grazing in the unoccupied prairies. He watched the skyline for the signal which Miss Keynote, the keeper of the railroad and related interests at the town, had indicated she would fly if occasion warranted. The aloofness of the young woman had changed into nearly partisan interest.

No one was in a better position to hear undercurrents of gossip, and her friendship gave Hudson deep satisfaction. The feeling that he was wholly alone, with none to give him warning, was dissipated by her bearing. She had come West for the chance of adventure, and he could depend on that kind of person . . .

The wolf pack had gone on its rounds. Hudson needed coffee, bacon, sugar and other supplies, so he took his remaining packhorse and went to Squarehead, circling wide and covering his tracks, in order to keep any one from knowing where he was camped. Coyotes were howling in the autumnal night, wailing, weary, jeering in their tones. To his ears the little wolves had a subdued and plaintive tone pitched in a different key from animals he had heard when he went out from Reaka Crossing at the Bad Lands Survey headquarters. He tried to detect differences in the local habits of the beasts. The influence of regions would be marked on such bright and intelligent animals. The wer pack unquestionably had influenced all the wild life of the higher types throughout their range, and he must observe the details, if he could discover them.

Approaching the railroad town was a long, rather narrow trough between two high, steep sloped prairie ridges. The sides and bottoms were rank with weeds and sage, the sod tough and unbroken. In only one place had any one homesteaded, and this was ten miles or so southeast of Squarehead. A big sodhouse with a tincan and bottle wing, a pole and barbed wire corral, and a pale webbing of trails converging there now marked the death of human aspirations—a black shadow at night.

Hudson kept to this valley, his two horses plodding on the long starlit trip. Dogs of homesteaders and road followers would not see him along this route. Sleepy with the monotony, he gave scant attention to his surroundings, except to keep west of the cutbank wash and to go around the heads of short branches, draws of a Bad Land to be.

Suddenly ahead of him he heard yelps and baying, as though wolves were running a deer or other quarry. Awakening, alert with a start, he listened while he tried to penetrate the night gloom. The sounds rode the northwest wind, coming south in the deep valley. He was close to the abandoned homestead, in the narrows below the wide flat of the claim. The wolf voices died down into a yelp or two and he could hear the trampling of hoofs and the creaking of the corral gate. His own horses tossed their heads, snorting doubtfully. A light flashed within the old claim building.

He recalled the complaint that the bobtailed wolves drove away stock as well as dragged down animals. He left his horses and drew near, weapons ready, to investigate.

Perhaps thirty head of prime cattle were drinking in the old spring dam waterhole at the corral. Horses, too, were watering. Men had gone into the building, where they were busy at the fireplace, getting a midnight meal.

With the drovers in and out, hustling around for wood, bringing water, busy at their affairs, Hudson could not go close enough to hear what was going on. Whoever they were, perhaps the drovers were none of his business. Cowboys running beef might howl like wolves for the lark of it. He surmised these animals were strays, caught in a roundup and now bound back to their own pastures, the old homestead a good place to stop at night. He backed off, regained his horses and cut over the west ridge on his way to town again.

Striking the north road, he moved on into town and, having roused the hostler, put up his horses and turned into a spare bunk to sleep part of the morning. After nine o'clock he went to the post office, then bought a newspaper to read at the Mustang House restaurant; the world events gave him a feeling of isolation he never before had known. At the gunsmith's he found two farmers buying .32-20 and .44 caliber rifle ammunition; both were angry and suspicious. Hudson went for his breakfast and then returned

to the cubby of an establishment.

"How about the wolves, trapper?" the gunsmith asked.

Hudson grinned wryly.

"A smart bunch, sure enough," he had to say frankly, and told how they had come helter-skelter down the dry wash and how the leader had discovered the traps, apparently while in midair, and thrown himself clear. When told how the wolves had sprung the traps with scratched gravel, the gunsmith nodded gravely.

"The next trick'll be different," he said. "Good trappers around here tried all they had, but none worked on that band."

"I'm not so sure they didn't," Hudson objected. "One's paw is cut half off, one has a twisted leg—all are crippled. Somebody caught them once, at least."

Thimbler looked wisely at Hudson.

"I've heard say so," he admitted. "They say a wolf will wrestle once with steel, and if he wins out, he never goes in for a second tight pinch. The pack went through west of here early last night, those two farmers buying shells told me. They heard them in the wind. This morning between them they saw their prairie grazers were cut."

Hudson started.

"How many did they lose?"

"They figure better than thirty head, the closest they can make it," the gun man said. "They heard the pack howling close by, but I reckon they pulled the blankets over their heads. Their turn to watch a community herd of better than two hundred head. In the morning the bunches looked thin, and sure enough on a tally, they were shy a good cut. Looks like your job, trapper."

The trapper nodded.

"Likely enough," Hudson admitted, going on his way.

Wolves were bad enough, but cattle rustlers were giving the outlaw pack opprobrium which was not all deserved. Hudson knew the wolves had gone north at least two days before the cattle theft, but the riders had shifted the blame from their own shoulders.

AT THE RAILROAD station when the morning eastbound mail had gone through, Hudson found Miss Keynote alone in the office posting her records. She gave him a slight greeting, finished the work and then after looking around to make sure there were no eavesdroppers, she told him local feeling was tense and divided. No one knew if any neighbor was to be trusted. Obviously an old-time gang was operating, and though definite information was lacking, the Mustang House crowd was regarded with increasing suspicion.

"It's a wonder they didn't kill you when you upset Dawder and Black Joe," she said. "You surprised them; besides, they fear the Government. Nobody else ever buffaloed them. I hear they sent scouts trying to find your camp. Do be careful."

"I never follow the same trail twice," Hudson said. "I'm a trapper, you know. I've run out some wolf sets for luck, tending to business. A man needs hobbies on the side, and I have mine. A queer lot, that bobtailed wolf pack."

"Every one's afraid of them." The girl shook her head. "I heard them going by the other night. Every time they come through cattle disappear, stores are raided out at the crossroads, and there have been other things—"

"Yes?"

"Attacks—killings," she said. "Clayden of the Lazy Box H was killed last summer—shot off his horse in broad day near Tinpan. A flock of nearly eight hundred sheep vanished a month ago, east of here toward Portburg—herder and all. Some think he was killed, but some think he worked with the wolves."

"Haven't you a sheriff in the county?"

"Oh, yes—a complete county administration. Said to be honest, too. It's just they don't know how to find out what is going on, or rather who is making things move. You see, there are four or five languages spoken in the county, including some white American, strange as that may seem. Austrian, Polish, Doukhabor Russian, some Scandinavian and Eastern

Germany—Black Forest. All of us believe in werwolves, too. We've heard them, seen them, felt them in our very souls. When enough people believe a thing, you know, it just has to be so."

"Whether it is or isn't!" Hudson laughed shortly.

Hudson went to eat with Miss Keynote at the boarding house, and immediately after dinner rode north. He went to Tinpan on the roadway and stopped at the Bersch ranch, whose owner welcomed him. The bobtailed wolves had come two nights before through the rough country in the Roundstones Valley. They were heard going by in the wind, but apparently they had done no damage; perhaps they had cut down a lone steer or beef heifer; the rancher had heard they ran off a bunch of beef west of Squarehead—just deviltry, perhaps.

The previous winter they had taken a notion to romp through bands of sheep bedded down, killing and maiming dozens of the helpless animals. They were linked with the vanishing of a band of seven hundred and ninety-three head just after Bersch went to complain to the Bad Lands Survey at Reaka Crossing.

Bersch rode with the Government trapper up to the Roundstones in Creeping River valley and showed him where the wolves came through, and by the buttes and stream bed, prairie country pilot marks, the old rancher gave Hudson his courses through the vast and lonely land.

Riding for miles on the werwolf circuit, there settled on Kit Hudson a certain feeling of respect and awe regarding his quarry. When night fell and it was time to camp, he drew to one side and took shelter in a blind cañon, but on a bench high and safe from any cloudburst flood. In the last twilight when coyotes began their prairie song, he sat on his blanket with his carbine, .22 automatic and captured revolver all at hand . . .

Carefully for three days Hudson searched the Creeping Basin and then entered a valley completely unoccupied by humanity. Low brush, broken lands, and the washes left by ages of cloudbursts gave cover, water and food supply to a large variety of wild creatures, including shaggy little horses in several small bands, antelope, and many small creatures.

Coyotes, badgers, ferrets, bobcats tracked the sands on stone in which were printed the footsteps of creatures who lived hundreds of thousands of years ago —three toed horses, saber-tooth tigers, weird flying reptiles, harassed and overgrown monsters. In the midday, as the trapper followed the course of the outlaw band, thirsty and happy, a mirage bedeviled his imagination with scenes as though he was wandering in mirage-memories of the silent, sleeping desert.

HIS HORSE carried him for hours, plodding steadily and, as if in an enchantment, he emerged from the arid wastes into sod prairie again, like riding out of one magic hall into another, and ahead of him he discerned the line of poles along the railroad and passed scattered homesteads. He drew down to Portburg in the glow of a glorious sunset of royal purple and gold, plodding into a dusty shack town with shipping pens and a tall grain elevator beside the rails, that stretched straight away farther than he could see east and west.

A livery barn hostler took Blight, promising to rub him down, give him grain and water—and did it under Hudson's eyes. Then the rider went to the hotel where he washed in a porcelain bowl with water that creaked over his skin. He knew better than to ask for coffee where milk was to be had. Supper was a big roast of ten-month beef—delicious. The town was so dead that even curiosity was lacking, and no one even hinted, wondering who the stranger was.

In the morning, when Hudson looked southwest from his second story window, he saw, far away, sloughs of reeds, alkali water and morass. His wolves would visit them! As soon as he had eaten, he packed a big snack in his saddlebags,

including corn for Blight, and rode for three hours before he could even see the marshes, and then he drew near to their edge.

Coming to the dark gumbo alkali shore line, he found myriads of paw prints mingled with the tracks of innumerable birds, creeping things, turtles, and serpents.

The long autumn drought had baked the stories of the passers-by in clay, and the trapper found seven places where the wolf pack had come plowing down the line heading into the sloughs after a fast, thirty mile dash over open country where they had no cover at all. Following the freshest, most recently made tracks into the marsh, they fled along a ridge which was four or five inches higher than the water on either side.

The bobtailed pack scattered to hunt through the low clusters of shrubs, in the stands of reeds, and through the shoals. They caught muskrats—sluggish root diggers—at feeding mounds, or along the runways.

Bounder had also caught a wild goose, perhaps a wounded bird, and had a fight with Moon Foot over it, the wolves rolling over and scrambling for rods over the slick, black alkali muck, the feathers and down flying with the wind over several acres.

When they had settled their row, the wolves had shaken off clots of mud that fell for twenty feet around them, and both had hunted deep water to wash off.

Hudson saw good trap sets through here, but he would need a boat, for the wolves would see his tracks in the mud. After the freeze-up he would need skis and skates, if he failed before that time in the Rascal bottoms. Striking the Old Emigrant Road, crossing the sloughs on a narrow ridge but with plenty of mud larking on the way, he turned west and where the old highway lifted out of the morass into the rolling country, he came to Waterholes, the county court seat.

Horses at tie rails, saddled and dangling latigoes and ropes, gun belted riders, some long, lanky; some short, stocky; several sleek gambler types, greeted him. The people stared, blank faced, sharp eyed, at the new arrival. Homesteaders, loose jawed aliens, stupid looking bystanders watched him as he dismounted and tied his horse.

Hungry and thirsty, Hudson entered a restaurant where a pretty girl chewing a toothpick sauntered up to him, her smile at once a welcome and an insult, in the manner of prairie metropolis hired help that is used to meeting all kinds. By the kitchen smell he knew he was early, the cabbage-carrots-corned beef boiled dinner not quite ready yet.

"Which way you ridin'?" she inquired, insolently.

"Migrating with the birds," he answered. "Sit down and have a glass of milk and a piece of pie, if you've eaten early."

"I've et." She smiled, sitting down opposite him. "Long riding?" she asked, significantly.

"No, I'm not rewarded—" he shook his head. "No use to tip the sheriff I'm here. I'm a Government trapper, Kit Hudson by name."

"Oh, not really," she gasped, coloring at his pay in kind. "Not the one who upset Black Joe's applecart and took Skep Dawder's gun apart?"

Hudson half rose from his chair.

"You knew that!" he exclaimed, astonished.

"Sure — everybody's laughing about Black Joe," the girl said. "He was real bad, while he lasted. But Skep Dawder's dif'rent. Being humbled don't learn him anything. Ain't you scairt of him, Mr. Hudson?"

Hudson smiled,

"I'm minding just my own business, Miss—?"

"Seva Linter, and Seva to you!" She smiled. "Everybody expects he'll shoot yet. They kinda anticipate he'll be tried here for murder, 'nless they git you for an alibi. Black Joe mout be mean, for he's notches on his gun. If they find you daid, trapper, it's going to be Skep they'll be suspicioning, yes, indeed!"

CHAPTER X

A TRUCE

KIT HUDSON, grown intent in studying the wolf pack trails, seeing no humans and few signs of mankind, had nearly forgotten the involved Squarehead angles of his relationships.

The restaurant waitress at Waterholes brought him back from complete wildcraft absorption.

"Ready!" a voice suddenly called from the kitchen.

Supper time was a fixed hour—six o'clock. Suddenly the crowd arrived, and Seva cried out—

"Oh, Sheriff—come here!"

A well fed man, slender, alert, with a red mustache and a weather beaten skin, perhaps forty years of age and wearing a gold badge on his suspender, came at the girl's summons.

"I want you two to meet. Mr. Kit Hudson — Sheriff Hackney of Rascal County. Reckon you've both heard of each other."

"I sure have," the sheriff said heartily, and the two shook hands.

Then while Hudson dallied over a slab of delicious cornmeal pudding, all dotted with seedless raisins, the sheriff headed into his helpings of corned beef boiled dinner.

"I came over to see you," Hudson said in a low voice, and briefly sketched his itinerary along the outlaw wolf pack's circuit. "That night the bobtails ran up west of Squarehead, I was southeast of town, in a long, narrow valley. About nine miles from town there's an abandoned homestead—"

The sheriff interrupted—

"The old Millinhaus claim—sodhouse and cans?"

"And bottles, too—yes," Hudson said. "Riders stopped there, bringing through a small band of cattle—about thirty head."

"That right?" The sheriff scowled thoughtfully. "You know, Hudson, I believe that's information. That's the first time I've had any real facts, separating that blamed wolf pack from humans. Can't be any mistake about that, Hudson? Till now, every one claims the bobtails run the cattle off—horses, too, for that matter."

"Well, they'd have had to turn human, there't the abandoned claim." Hudson grinned very knowingly. "They were men, there."

"That's the hell of it," the sheriff said, unsmiling. "Those prairie lunkhead homesteaders claim that's just what happens—part time wolves, part time humans. Can't any one believe that, can they?"

"Of course they can't!" Hudson declared with emphasis. "But they do. That's the reason I came to you about it. My superintendent sent me here to catch those wolves. I'm a Government trapper, and I'll catch them while they are wolves. You catch them while they are men. If we work together, they've got to be something or other, when we close in on them. That stands to reason, don't it?"

"Yeh," the sheriff grunted. "I laughed along at first. I had to. Who the hell'd ever think bobtailed wolves'd be serious in politics—all that talk of humans turning wolf and wolves turning into humans!

"Time was once when I wanted this whole country filled up with popuation. Now we've that line of bohunk and lantern jawed settlers, lots of them naturalized and able to vote with the most astonishing ignorance, I ain't so sure. Tell you what you do. You chase them wolves around and figure out where they're going to turn human; about the time they change, I'll git my sights drawn down on them—"

"And you'll have your rifle loaded with silver bullets, too," Hudson said, seriously.

"You believe that?" Hackney snorted contemptuously then laughed with Hudson, adding in a grave voice, "Well, that's the situation!"

CHAPTER XI

IN THE RECORD

HUDSON was tired, and it was noon before he came down the next day. And after eating he tried to think of some excuse to remain over another day. There was none.

"Reckon I'll be moving," he told Seva regretfully.

So Hudson took his departure, duty calling. Blight nuzzled him at the livery barn. He saddled and rode south, cutting eastward to follow the edge of the slough where a low bluff and several feet of water marked the shore. In a patch of gumbo and alkali he found months' old tracks of the five wolves baked in the dried flat, where they had galloped at top speed, crossing open country with long, nervous bounds.

As the sun set, twilight settling to afterglows, Hudson approached the brink of the Rascal Bad Lands fifty miles or so east and downstream from his home cabin. Suddenly a wailing yelp came with the wind, freezing him stiff. After having followed the great wolf circuit for many days, he now heard them coming.

To his surprise, he recognized their voices, having heard them at a kill. Big Moon Foot was shrill and squealing; Slipper, a much smaller beast, bayed and boomed. All were coming out of the north; they must have slept during the day in the slough weeds on low mounds or muskrat houses in the marsh weeds, beginning their romp at dusk.

The open prairies had no homesteads and only one human was trespassing the wilderness so far as Hudson knew. Drawing the carbine from its boot, Hudson tried the magazine, felt in the chamber to make sure it was loaded, and then glanced into the cylinders of his captured revolver. His .22 automatic, too, was ready.

A few hundred feet west was an upwind skyline. A flicker of motion, a sharp look and he saw the five beasts following the height. He wished for just a little more light by which to shoot, but it was no use, and he watched them go by. They ducked into a dry wash and a minute later he heard them on the Rascal flats, stopping to drink at a ford, and then crossing, they vanished beyond hearing when a little cañon swallowed them.

They left Hudson shaken and dry mouthed. Blight had been afraid, dragging at his bridle reins. Education, intelligence, reason itself did not wholly conquer the dread instinct and doubts. His conscious mind knew better, but his subconscious did not. After the beasts were gone the trapper tried to speak to his horse, only to find his voice trembled and the words were thick in his throat.

Heading westward, he found the draw through which the animals ran down to the river level, but Blight refused to enter it for the trough reeked of wolf sweat; the trapper could smell the asafetida when he went into the hollow on foot. A hand flash revealed the tracks in the loose sand. Two miles westward the horse did not object to another descent, though it was steep, stepped and difficult. They reached the bottom where Hudson ate a cold snack, the horse grazed, and both had a night's rest.

In the morning Hudson headed south to cut the wolf circuit, and about six miles distant he found where the band had cornered a doe and two fawns in a blind cañon, destroying all three. The wolves were heading west, in rough breaks, following a meandering fork of the Rascal. The stream led him nearly a mile from the kill, through a narrows into a tumult of low gravel and small boulder knolls, perhaps two hundred acres in extent, surrounded by perpendicular walls, cut by deep V slots of washes.

He was perhaps a quarter of a mile into this formation when he heard behind him a yelping like laughter and, turning, he caught a glimpse of all five of the wolves dashing back down the stream, as they looked over their shoulders, red mouths open, on their way. How had he missed seeing them?

Going back, he searched for their beds,

and found them on tops of gravel mounds in clusters of shrubs and grassy sod. They had turned to the left to lie down after their gorge of venison. The northwest wind would carry the scent of an intruder to their nostrils should anything pass up or down the natural thoroughfare. In fact, he had been within sixty or seventy yards of Moon Foot and Bounder, who, watching him, had waited till he was a long rifle shot past. The horse could not smell them for they had carefully gone downwind to have the advantage of the scent—in the way of cunning wild creatures—and he had been unable to see them as they lay quietly screened in their beds.

Every experience added to his knowledge of how sly and alert these outlaws were, how surely they took every advantage possible. He cut back to the Rascal River and followed it westward even after nightfall, for he was near the big beaver dam downstream from his cabin, and he would arrive home late, which was better than making camp. At the grass he turned Blight loose and carried the saddle and duffle into the cabin, where he cooked supper.

The time was close for the pack to come through again, on their bi-monthly circuit. Though he was weary and sleepy, he took his carbine and climbed to the cliff top above his cabin, there to listen in the wind. Every time he heard the creatures, every least thing learned about them, was so much gain; he could not overlook any bets.

Suddenly, clear as music in the night, he heard the wolves far away, coming as they bayed and yelped. At first they were nearly south. They crossed a divide, and their voices were plain. In some hollow they were quite out of hearing, but a moment later they were on another crest and much nearer, more clearly audible. So they swung along, up and down, in the deep draws and up over the crests. And finally he heard them strike over toward the sand dunes, ceasing their romp and scattering down to sleep through the midnight. They had gone to rest, apparently, on tops of the knolls or bits of tabletop buttes, and that was ample return for Hudson's loss of sleep. They had run true to schedule by the calendar!

"I'm learning," he told himself; adding, "I've sure got to!"

IN THE morning he found wolves and coyotes in his traps —three lobos and four of the little fellows. He skinned them, of course, though he did not count them for much. He was sorry, in fact, because the capture of a wolf in a spot set probably meant the bobtails would know about it and swing wide when they came through there next time.

He took out three spot sets of five traps each and, going along grassy backs of sand dunes, put down open jaws "for luck" in places where a wolf could look over a big country without being seen. Another trapper probably would have laughed at that gamble. There was not one chance in a thousand, in ten thousand, that he could guess where a wolf pack would chance to sleep in two weeks, in four weeks, in three months from then—but Kit Hudson took that chance.

One of his spot sets was in a scattering of cedars on the point of a flatiron top; he placed one trap in a cluster of low brush and another about six feet behind it, toward a tree. The brush looked down on the Rascal bottoms a third of a mile away.

Wherever he walked on the sand Hudson brushed out the tracks made by his feet, which he wrapped loosely in green deer hide. Then a good wind spread the drifting particles, covering the trail. He had made fine sets, but must trust to luck if a wolf, especially one of the bobtails, came his way. Restlessly he rode far and wide, learning localities and tracking coyotes, wolves, and other wild creatures, learning their habits, whether stay-at-homes or circuit runners, like the gray "superstition" pack.

Sheriff Hackney had given him infortion about the human outlaw band whose

operations had given the river the name of Rascal. The desperadoes had numbered from five to thirteen or fourteen, and when the railroad was built, they had supplied the contract with beef. Hundreds of tons were rustled from the great herds of the big ranches, and there had been battles, killings, hard feelings which had left scars, court records and low, unmarked mounds across the rolling lands. Politics still felt the tragic influences, and a number of pamphlets and "histories" had been written to give prejudiced versions of the ranchers, settlers, nesters and vigilantes.

"Prairie Catone's one of the old ranch families," Hackney had said. "Her dad was one of the best of them. For years she was educated in schools back East, but she'd never leave the open country. She'd be rich if she could find her father's gold, but I reckon she never will. Bad men probably followed him down into the broken lands and located where he cached his fortune. She's living on the old outfit, now. She works awhile at the Mustang House, and then carries supplies to the ranch. Don't any one bother her. She can shoot, if necessary. Minds her own business, right."

Reading in his spare evenings, when he wasn't too tired, Hudson found the old prairie lore fascinating. One of the old Rascals was Tim O'Bale. He had been killed, and no doubt the Mustang O'Bale was his son.

The name Malley appeared, too—an attorney who had handled most of the cases for the outlaws. This might, or might not mean anything so far as Rusk Malley, alias Booksey, was concerned, but it emphasized the lines of developments and inheritances. Malley had been a shrewd attorney and he figured in the histories as well as in the legal documents.

"Queer stuff for a wolf trapper to work over!" But Hudson had an instinctive feeling that even history might help him get the hang of affairs across the Bone Nest Prairies, and that strange phenomenon of werwolves.

"Humbolt Malley," he read, "brought the first general library to the great Rascal, Bone Nest, Roundstones and vast prairie and sand dunes regions. He made a collection of Indian antiquities and for a hobby studied quaint beliefs. He let nothing interfere with his ransacking legal lore for those tricky little quirks and exceptions, shades of meaning, which would, in a tight place, do his clients the most good. His wife was Yetta Gurkey, famous for her beauty, and he had nine children, all of whom he educated in leading universities.

"He figured in some of the most famous criminal litigations west of the Missouri, and the greatest case resulted in the acquittal of Tubb Hipes, Tim O'Bale, Knuck Gurkey—his wife's brother—Jake Tetone, Bob Fortey and Dunk Milkin, who were accused of the murder of Melden Claterson, whose ranch was raided on Roundstones River. A running fight to save rustled cattle ensued, at about the site of the new and thriving metropolis, Squarehead. Jude Capes and Huck Capes, brothers, who were wounded, turned State's evidence, but Malley with consummate legal resourcefulness prevented corroborative evidence of a circumstantial character remaining in the records. Unfortunately, Mr. Malley died while celebrating his great victory, and soon afterward Jerome Wricks, his partner, retired from law practise to run for Congress."

Hudson had the uneasy feeling that now he was arriving somewhere, though he could not be sure just where. For one thing, the whole region was shone upon by the illustrious names of its original leading citizens. The early dominion of outlawry and great cattle ranches had now resolved itself into the dark shadow of alien settlers' superstition which spread wide over the cut up pastures. Criminals were still active, hardly in a clandestine way. The great ranches were represented, apparently by Prairie Catone, a part-time, tough hotel waitress. The old conflicts still echoed over the prairies, and the howls of a wolf pack seemed

in some inexplicable way to be united with the operations of the natural successors of the old Rascal Bad Lands outlaws.

DAILY the white raven with ruby eyes, black bill and legs came with its mates to feast on venison scraps, skinned jackrabbits and other inviting delicacies hung through the branches of the cottonwoods which screened the trapper's cabin. The birds now came to dine while he sat leaning against his cabin wall, basking in the late autumn sunshine of early morning. Winter was coming on apace, so when he rode forth he carried ample cover and extra food supplies lest a blizzard catch him abroad. Fur was prime, fluffy on the backs of coyotes or wolves when the wind blew against the lie of the hair, making it shine in the sunshine.

One afternoon he took his packhorse and rode Blight past Howling Butte, bound for Squarehead. A suspicious milkiness had appeared in the skies. The day was warm, the wind uncertain, and he carried plenty of food and an extra coat of fur. As he left the water on the south side, where wild maverick tracks and those of strayed horses covered his own, he wondered whether to keep on upstream, or to take the time to inspect three point sets which he had put down blind, on the remote chance that wolves might come to lie where they could overlook the river bottoms. Nothing was in them.

Far upstream he crossed the Rascal and climbed a deep draw to the north prairie, west of Pilot Butte, where he had been shot at. Night had fallen. The packhorse, scrambling ahead, stopped short at the sod level, jerking its head. Hudson ran up and, looking around, saw a band of four men, perhaps half a mile distant, silhouetted against the western afterglow, shoulders up, heads forward, like vultures in the saddles. Four packhorses were loaded with deer. Obviously a party had been down in the Bad Lands after venison. Going on, they went over a prairie roll and disappeared in the direction of Squarehead.

Waiting awhile, Hudson resumed his ride to town, swinging easterly to avoid contact with the strangers. Taking their own gait, the horses' stride was faster than usual, knowing a grain feed and stable stall awaited them at the end of the journey to town.

The hostler was just turning in when, toward morning, Hudson arrived. He said hunters had just come in with game and he had put up their horses. Lending a hand with Blight and the packhorse, the trapper saw the eight animals the men had brought in, and some of the brands had been blotched. All were eating comfortably. Four were lank, half-breed Kentucky blood. Every one was freshly curried and wiped down to the hocks. Just so are long riders careful with their mounts, keeping them ready for the ordeals of distance or speed, or both. After his own animals were stalled and fed, Hudson rolled into a spare stable bunk and slept till nearly noon.

When he went for breakfast to O'Bale's Mustang he found "wild meat" on the menu, a concession to the game laws. Two strangers entered as he studied the list. A strange girl left the kitchen and, passing Hudson rather deliberately, went to the newcomers' table. She was buxom, rather handsome in a heavy way.

"Mornin', boys," she greeted the riders. "What's your fodder?"

"A double ham and eggs," one said.

"Me the same," the other answered, and the girl returned to the kitchen.

Hudson, facing the street, noticed a grin on the face of the man he could see. The cook slapped things around and the girl brought bread, water, tableware, still ignoring Hudson.

The Government trapper was aware of the intent in the slight. O'Bale appeared in the office and, catching his glance with a quick, unexpected look, Hudson called sharply—

"Come here, O'Bale!"

The proprietor hesitated, glanced

around, but decided it was wise to come.

"Well?" he inquired, the left corner of his lip lifting.

"Go get the waitress," Hudson said. "I want to be introduced."

"What's that?" O'Bale demanded angrily.

"Do as I say!" Hudson ordered. "Quit stalling or I'll just naturally tear out the sides and let the roof fall in!"

For an instant the man hesitated, then waddled to the kitchen.

"Claire," he called, "c'mere."

The girl emerged and O'Bale led the way to Hudson.

"Tell her I want the best grub in the house," Hudson said. "Wild meat, cut thick and broiled right. Mashed potatoes, coffee with cream, boiled onions—shoot the works, now! Never mind introducing me. She'd rather not know me, I expect."

"You heard him—" O'Bale turned to the girl, his voice pleading.

"That goes as played," she chuckled. "You're boss."

"Sit down, O'Bale," Hudson demanded, and the man perched on the edge of a chair. "Now if there was another place in Squarehead, I'd go there. As it is, are you going to give me a white man's deal, or not?"

"Why sure, Mr. Hudson!"

"All right, then."

City Marshal Weygan entered and Claire took his order, scurrying with it, her cheeks bright. The officer yawned and stretched, apparently unaware of the crisis.

"Mornin', O'Bale," he greeted.

"Mornin'," the man answered.

"You can go, now," Hudson said tartly. "But after this I want everything to be just so, understand?"

"Yes, Mr. Hudson."

The marshal's face screwed up, puzzled, glancing at Hudson, who sat with his back in the corner.

"Better eat with me this morning, Marshal," the trapper suggested. "Or shall I come over there?"

"I'll join you." Weygan grinned. "Closer to the kitchen and the grub'll be that much hotter! See by the paper you went to the county court last week."

"I sure did," Hudson said. "Chased those bobtailed wolves clear around the circuit, almost. They cover better'n two hundred miles, angling back and forth, hunting game and all."

CASUALLY, he talked about their fast dashes across country, and related details of their habits he had observed. The marshal listened closely.

Having finished the big steaks, the two went to the marshal's office in the city hall. Weygan brought the city recorder's docket, and showed Hudson, among the pages of petty larceny, disorderly conduct and peace disturbances, two entries which read:

Skep Dawder, 21 yrs., suspicious character, fined $25.
Black Joe Hipes, abusive language, disorderly, fined $25.

"They wan't right, getting rough to strangers," Weygan explained. "Thought I'd show it to you—and this, too." His fingers indicated a line—

Note: 30 days, suspended; allowed to leave town.

"Of course, if they kept on going the way they were," Hudson commented, "somebody might have had to be buried at public expense, too."

Hudson went to the railroad station. The operator, Miss Keynote, received him with an expressionless face and resentful eyes, decidedly cool. The presence of shippers, passengers waiting for the eastbound and loungers prevented him from making any inquiry other than to ascertain if any messages had come for him. None had. Buying supplies, he made up his pack, and as the afternoon waned he looked south, morosely. The way to his lonely camp was far and unattractive. He had anticipated a warm smile, at least; the girl at the railroad had been totally indifferent, and he couldn't imagine what was wrong with her.

After the westbound came through, he went to the post office and found a telegraph message which had been mailed to him, which read:

DON'T BE A FOOL STOP MIGRATORY BIRDS HUNTING FOR YOUR CABIN STOP KILLER WOLVES WATCHING CHANCE STOP
—OFFICIAL

Bystanders had drawn near as he read, but he pocketed the warning, going to the street. Rusk Malley and a stranger were outside, talking at the curb.

"Home again after spreeing around at Government expense?" Malley greeted in a sarcastically pleasant tone. "Pretty soft, eh?"

Hudson had not been long enough in the department to receive that slur with patience.

"I shouldn't talk that way too much, Malley," he said quietly. "You might meet a Government man who is neither good natured nor slow tempered."

"I'll take my chance." Malley grinned with malice, now.

"A chance to go straight and on the level?" Hudson asked.

The man's lips drew back from his fine, clenched teeth, his eyes narrowing and hate flashing in his countenance like the grimace of a savage pekan in a steel trap. Hudson had stung him. For a moment Malley's hands hovered with his fingers hooked, his posture that of a man stiffening to go for his holster guns.

"Eh, Booksey!" a sharp voice intruded, and slowly the man looked over his shoulder.

City Marshal Weygan was standing, his own fist wrapped around his old .45 Colt, ready.

"Why—uh—howdy, Marshal—" Malley greeted, his voice hollow.

"Ruffle down your neck," Weygan said coldly. "You've been told, ain't you? Or did you forgit what the committee said?"

"I was just joking, Marshal," Malley said.

"Well, quit it," the officer replied sharply.

"All right—if he's your pet!"

Hudson stood, thinking. He glanced at Weygan, who shook his head, and the Government trapper turned toward the railroad.

At the station he found Miss Keynote reading a novel. She looked at him level eyed, her features immobile, as if he were merely a customer of the railroad.

"Well?" she inquired, professionally.

"I've a message here—" he held out the paper. "It says 'Don't be a fool,' which is difficult for me. 'Migratory birds are hunting'—that seems cryptic. 'Killer wolves watching chance' . . . Sounds like bad business."

"It's so," the girl exclaimed. "That O'Bale hangout gang'll do anything to get you. If not one way, then another."

"Because I'm after the bobtailed wolves?" he asked.

"You saw Sheriff Hackney, and they know you are working with him," she said. "Every one does. Flirting with Seva Linter and Prairie Catone, too!"

Her voice accused him, scornfully bitter in its tone. Hudson stood hot cheeked, staring at the warning message on the counter. The genial companionship with the two waitresses weighted his conscience, now.

"I'm sorry," he mumbled.

"Indeed?" she inquired.

"Well," he said lamely, "thank you for this, anyway—" he pushed the message to her. "It's real friendly—to the Government. . ."

He left and soon took the road for the Bad Lands.

CHAPTER XII

SILVER BULLETS

NIGHT arched over the wide, lone prairie, and at the ruin of a sod-house Hudson swung down from his horse. Leaving Blight and the pack animal standing on reins and halter rope, he walked to the top of a low swell. He

stood, his .25-35 in the crook of his arm, looking and listening. Nearly due south was Signal Butte, and far beyond the silvery line of the Bad Lands and sand dunes flickered like pearl, reflecting stars, broken by the high, mesa blackness. By the calendar the bobtailed wolf pack was due to come through here within a night or two.

The wolves made a convenient excuse for Hudson's vigil, yet deep in his consciousness he knew the menace of the outlaws; the warnings, the strange jeopardies which surrounded him, made this caution and watchfulness necessary, and supremely sensible.

Sure enough, presently he heard horses coming down the line, hoofs throbbing as they walked on baked, frost set flat. His binoculars, after a time, disclosed shadowy horsemen approaching to pass perhaps a third of a mile distant. One of them rode a light horse—a gray, or even sorrel, which seemed fairly white in the starlight. They drove several animals ahead of them, one carrying a pack covered with white canvas that was probably supplies.

The riders were moaning "Bury Me on the Lone Prairie-e-e", and one voice was high pitched, peculiarly penetrating, but musical and carrying far. Squatted in the grass, Hudson waited till the faintest sound no longer reached his ears, and then returned to his own horses.

Bearing westerly, the riders were heading for the sand dunes, or west of them. Probably they had a ranch or cabin in the Bad Lands, perhaps within twenty miles of his own, for they would not be likely to risk the open with the blizzard then threatening.

The chances favored a snug, hidden retreat, though Hudson had been told no one lived in the Rascal Bad Lands—no outfits, nesters or homesteaders—because every one who had tried the country had been starved out; but the Government trapper knew better. Over the country hung the shadow of lawlessness. Grass was good, shelter was assured for cattle, and the trapping alone would have given ample winter income. The violence of thieves more than anything else had left the land unclaimed.

Swinging easterly, Hudson waded down the Rascal River past the Howling Butte, into his own nearly inaccessible cottonwood flat. Having rubbed down his horses in the first dawn, he turned them loose and then carefully packed his load to the hidden old-time cabin of which no rumor had come to him. He had made much faster time going and coming, now that he and the horses knew the country—traveling in surer courses to and fro. Even the stars in the sky seemed more familiar to him.

An Easterner, a woodsman, used to still-hunting deer in green timber, he was more used to traveling on foot in trapping and game country. Horses made easier and even faster going across the open country, but in the Bad Lands with five men, at least, somewhere in the same territory, Hudson felt that he could better hide himself if he went on foot.

His traps were scattered over a big country, spot sets in Bad Lands, sand dunes, and especially in the draws running north into the Rascal River, down which the bobtails came, and up the several outlets into the less broken prairies to the north. With his rifle in the crook of his elbow, thumb on hammer, his binoculars on a lanyard against his chest, and a snug rucksack of grub, he covered his line, looking down on each group from some distant height, so that no sign or taint of his efforts caught the attention of the wild, suspicious creatures he was seeking.

In visiting the traps he was obliged to sleep out two nights on his circuit, but this was no hardship. He caught two ordinary gray wolves, whose skins he pelted; they were eaters of cottontails, mice, gophers, and one had just devoured a fish. Neither had badly disturbed the sets, lifting the traps and chain drags all clear with one bound, and becoming tangled up a few hundred feet distant in brush.

A long, hard bottom brook led winding

through the sand dunes, the fast flow in a narrow channel carrying the sand into the Rascal, where in pools it became quick. This stream enabled Hudson to penetrate the heart of the drifting hills without leaving tracks. Near the head springs he came to a horse track out of the east, heading toward Howling Butte through the dune hollows. A clay suck at the brook crossing with cloudy water indicated a passer-by within the past two or three hours.

The trapper backed out, knowing that that horseman was after him, or trying to locate his camp.

The day was waning as Hudson neared the Rascal bottoms. Between him and Howling Butte was a set on a flatiron mesa top, where he had five traps near the point behind the low bushes. Behind him was another group of traps, put down on the chance the bobtailed lobos might lurk on the high land where they could overlook the Rascal bottoms and surrounding washes and gulches in the Bad Lands.

Suddenly he heard the whinny of a horse, the hail of an animal growing impatient at being left too long at a rail. The trapper halted abruptly, every sense alert. Listening, his rifle held ready for business, he heard a wailing cry, like a man gasping for breath—

"Hey—hey—hey!"

SLIPPING back to the shelter of a buffalo bush clump, he looked around the dimming skyline. The sun was down. The twilight was slowly deepening. With his glasses he presently discerned a moving body at the flatiron point of mesa land where he had his traps set, but what it was the brush hid. The cries were from that direction, and Hudson froze at the thought of a trick to draw him into gunsights.

Cutting around, stooping and darting from cover to cover, he found at the south end of the long butte a horse with its bridle reins tied to a gnarled cedar tree. Up the butte led the footprints of a man, and the rifle boot on the saddle was empty. Hudson realized then what had happened. Some one had crept down to the point to wait for a shot at him when he went up the Rascal bottoms and, creeping on his hands and knees— Sure enough—a scoundrel had found trouble!

It was Joe Hipes. Over his back was a big carbine .32-40. One hand had come down on a trap pan, and when he threw himself, hurt and surprised at the grab, his other had been caught likewise. There he was, held by both hands, and as one trap had been ringed with haywire to springing sage roots dangling down the slope instead of to the usual drag hooks, the human capture had been unable to get away.

Hudson had noticed that of all the knoll and sod tops, this one was the most favorable from which to watch the Rascal flats—an ideal ambush. Hipes' rifle was a good one, fitted with sights for enormous ranges, and it shot high power long-nose ammunition. When Hudson spoke to him, the bully fainted. Evidently he had come into that ambush to avenge the humiliating knockout at the Mustang House. With both hands caught, he could not find purchase enough to open the jaws of either trap.

Hudson freed the hands with screw clamps. Fortunately for Hipes, he had on thick gloves with gauntlets, and neither trap had steel teeth. Fear more than pain had broken the victim on that long day, not knowing but he might lie there a week, waiting to be rescued by the man he had come before daylight to assassinate: the gloves revealed that he had arrived in the frost of false, or even black dawn, to watch for Hudson to appear at the river.

"Well, this set is spoiled for the bobtails," Hudson said, regretfully. "No wolf would come here—at least not till spring when the place is all aired out."

Swinging the limp man to his shoulder —no light load—the trapper packed him to the hollow where the horse was waiting. It was a light animal in color; no doubt Black Joe was one of the men Hudson

had seen following him from Squarehead, two nights before.

Thrown to fork his own saddle, Hipes rode to the river where, in a few minutes, water dashed into his face revived him. By this time it was dark.

"Thought you'd gone to Wyoming or Montana," Hudson said. "What you doing down here, Joe?"

"Who are you?" Black Joe asked, and then groaned as his hands distracted his attention by their agony.

"Get going for town or you'll lose those paws," Hudson said.

Black Joe's mount surged down toward the stream as the man, half conscious, gave the animal its head on the way to Squarehead.

"No matter what happens, they can ride," Hudson reflected.

In the morning he covered the draw sets in the prairie washes. Luck was with him. In one draw he could see where a band of coyotes had galloped down the pools of loose, dry sand over the falls where hardpans had checked the wash. Romping carelessly, two had landed in traps set where Hudson had figured such passers-by would strike from a three foot take-off.

They were not just ordinary coyotes; both were two-year-olds. And both had bobbed tails!

The trapper, unbeliever that he was, hesitated as he leveled his .22 automatic for he recalled the old superstition that changelings at the moment of violent death sometimes return, partially, to their other form, dying with both human and wolf characteristics, if wers. Shooting, the coyotes died coyotes, and Hudson breathed with some relief, though he ridiculed his involuntary tribute to superstition.

Both pelts were fine, prime fur, good to work up with the others he had taken, making a winter blanket robe if he could kill and catch enough to trim out the thick backs. He examined the short caudal stubs, but could make nothing of them. The capture of the beasts might leave sign that would alarm others, though he could not be sure the successful sets wouldn't lure others to the same doom.

Back in his cabin the trapper dressed the skins in their own brains, knuckling them in a sagebrush smudge to boot, considering as he worked what he ought to do.

Outlaws were hunting him to assassinate him. Unable to report success in the case of the mysterious pack of gray wolves, he hated to quit, of course. The two bobtailed coyotes proved that the big fellows were not invulnerable.

Hudson wrote out a full account of his operations and carried the letter north to town on the following day, leaving his cabin before daybreak and taking pains to cover every track. Some whimsy led him to swing the big buffalo single shot rifle in its scabbard from his saddle. Beside it his .25-35 carbine looked like a plaything, and compared to the big slugs thrown by the old-timer, the tiny projectiles were at the long ranges quite ineffective.

Riding rather urgently, Hudson drove Blight to Squarehead in the shortest possible time, leaving the horse for the hostler to rub down, and going to the post office. At the restaurant the noon meal was still being served. O'Bale received him with scant civility, but Prairie Catone was back again.

"Black Joe's hiding upstairs," Prairie whispered when the chance came. "Pair of bad hands to doctor. Claims they were twisted in a double rope loop. He sure can't use a gun for awhile. That's one sure thing."

Through with dinner, Hudson went to the gunsmith's. In any outlying community, along wilderness borders, or in hunting country, the man who repairs firearms can, if he will, give a wildcrafter the lowdown on present conditions as well as local history.

"Can you stiffen the trigger pull on this revolver?" Hudson asked, handing over the weapon he had taken that night when on his way to load his trap freight on the truck to carry it south to the Rascal.

THE GUNSMITH took the weapon, poked out the cylinder shells and opened the mechanism. Lifting out the hammer, he examined the dog, then went to work with a tiny file on the release notches. After three touches he remounted the weapon and Hudson tried the pull. It was still too light, but when a shade more than a pound pressure released the hammer, he was satisfied; the three-ounce pull had been too light. The gunsmith attended strictly to business, giving only monosyllabic answers to questions, volunteering no gossip till the job was done. Then he said:

"Nice gun you got. Fine sheath and belt, too."

"I like the outfit," Hudson said, having loaded the gun and shoved it, ready for business, into the holster.

"The best I ever saw come to this town," the man declared.

"That so?"

"Yes, sir," the gunsmith answered, looking out the front window, his voice lowering. "One of the best Cheyenne holsters I ever saw. Been worked, too, slick and right. Three times as fast as it was when new. You've kept it good—snake oil?"

"No; 'coon and castor."

"Just as good," Thimbler said. "Some say castor oil is a shade better, coming to a fine point. 'Course, 'tain't none of my business, if you don't mind, but I'd like to know where that gun came from?"

"The notches aren't mine," Hudson answered, hesitating. "In fact, the night I came to town after my freight, a man followed me out of the Mustang, in back. Carrying this revolver in his hand, he made the mistake of coming around the high board fence at the hardware store, and so I took it, harness and all."

"He had it in his *hand?*" the gunsmith exclaimed. "All *ready?*"

"Ready for everything but my carbine butt," Hudson said.

"Doggone, man, if you ain't lucky! Or awful danged fast!" The gunsmith stared at him. "You knock Black Joe endwise; you give Skep Dawder a sore stomach for weeks; and then you walk off with this gun! Doggone, man! If I wan't jest naturally obleeged to be neutral, I'd be sure tempted to back your play, spite of what you're up against!"

"I *have* been lucky, Thimbler," Hudson admitted.

"Men who don't miss any bets are apt to be," the gunsmith declared, dryly.

"You said when I first came to this country that the main proposition about the killer wolves was their bobbed tails," Hudson said suddenly.

"*So*, wasn't it?"

"Seems like," Hudson admitted. "I caught two coyotes with bobbed tails, too."

"Not traps?" the man exclaimed.

"Sure did. Down a steep draw; a pack of four, I think, jumped over the steps and two landed on pans. The others went straight up the slide banks on to the prairie."

"About them tails?" the gunsmith asked.

"Cut square off."

"I carry a good line of silver bullets," Thimbler said, reaching into his safe and bringing out a drawer, meant for a card index. In it were .30-30's, .32-40's, .38-56's, .45-90's, all mixed in with revolver shorts, longs and standards. Hudson looked at the cartridges with curiosity.

"Here are some silver buckshot shells, too." The gunsmith grinned. "Twelve gages, mostly. Five tens, though. I hear you brought in an old-timer—a .50-110. Better take five of these—one for each of those bobtailed grays, and here's a magazine full for your .25-35."

He laid five bright brass shells with silver bullets, wax linen patched, on the counter. Hudson looked at him. A shadow at the entrance of the shop was that of a Mustang House hanger-on—a stranger to Hudson.

"I may need them, for a fact," Hudson said, picking up the shells and putting them into his pocket.

"Have you a spare clip for your .22 automatic?" Thimbler asked.

"Oh, yes," Hudson said.

"You better take a fill of silvers for it, too," the gunsmith said, counting down ten greaseless long-rifles with bright white bullets, and Hudson took a spare clip out of a belt case which he emptied of the lead shells, and put in silver tips.

The man who had come into the store bought a box of .45 S&W shells and immediately left, fairly running.

"You see, it's mighty interesting, your taking on a line of silver bullets," the gunsmith said, his expression serious but for a slight twinkle of his eyes. "Mr. Hudson, I'd said the first week that you hadn't a ghost of a show. I ain't sure, now, but what the odds are resting your way. None of my business, 'course. Same time, they say Black Joe Hipes is back, both hands doctoring. Hear anything about it?"

"Prairie Catone says he tangled in a rope—both wrists."

"Some sayd dif'rent," the gunsmith said. "You covered all your wolf traps, lately?"

"Within a week or so " Hudson said.

"Um-m— Using bait sets, I suppose?"

"No use for baits for the one's I'm after." Hudson shook his head. "They wouldn't run within a mile of dead bait. I've got to guess where they are going to bed down, run, skulk, drink—places like that."

"You expect to get ahead of them thataway?"

"Got to do it, or fall down."

"Well, bullets would be more reliable—"

"Silver ones," Hudson admitted, grinning.

"I'd like to know, some time, if one of your traps has been disturbed," Thimbler remarked. "You see, there's talk. I'm just an old granny, listening to gossip. 'Bout all the int'rests a man has, here in Squarehead—if he don't mix up in nothing. First, I'll tell you—Thimbler hesitated a minute, before continuing. "Now about that revolver, Hudson—" the gunsmith squinted. "You didn't ask any questions. I bought that outfit for Jasper Heyden. He's bad—cold blooded and don't make mistakes. If he kills a man he means it. 'Tain't none of my business, understand, if you don't want to tell me—"

"I've nothing to hide, Thimbler," Hudson said, and then he went on to relate the story of how he had come into possession of the outfit.

"Shu-u-u!" Thimbler frowned. "Heyden never was blustery, and he's been in lately, not wearing his belt. I thought it was his disposition to obey the gun toting law. 'Course, he had a pocket gun. He's been studying my leather goods catalogues—I noticed that. The way they're laying low, I wonder if you ain't got them boys buffaloed? They act bothered, but don't place no dependence on them. Keep your eyes peeled."

"Well," Hudson replied, laughing, "now that I have these silver bullets, I'm ready for—anything!"

Hudson went to the railroad, where Miss Keynote was not especially cordial, but she gave him permission to escort her home after the evening train went west and her desk was in order.

"You ought to leave this country," she told him. "You interfere with their business and they are determined to kill you. No one knows how many they have killed. They're a bad crowd, I tell you!"

Badly worried about him, liking him the way she did, the girl begged Hudson to quit. She said all the wolves and stock in the world could not matter. Urging him, she caught his shoulders to shake sense into him, and he just couldn't help taking her in his arms to reassure her—then begged her pardon hastily.

"It wouldn't matter if you'd only go," she sighed.

Hudson seemed annoyed.

"And leave my job unfinished?" he asked. "The Government sent me after those wolves, and I'll get them. Probably I could keep my job, even if I didn't kill them; but imagine a government trapper being run out by a lot of sheep stealers and cattle rustlers!"

"They are more than that," she said. "They are man killers."

CHAPTER XIII

TAILS OF THE WERES

WHEN Kit Hudson headed south again, anger welled in his heart. Minding his own business, hunting the outlaw wolves, desperadoes were hunting him to the death. Bets were being made at their hangout in Squarehead that they would get him. The banker, Fletcher, the station agent, the gunsmith, Prairie Catone, all gave him fair warning that he had better quit—leave the country.

At least four outlaws were in the Rascal basin looking for him now. Tired of ducking and dodging, unnerved and indignant, the trapper returned to his cabin. Keeping out of the way had accomplished nothing. Either he must leave the country or suppress the menace. Not one to run away, neither would he quit a job before he had completed it.

The next morning, Hudson took the big .50-100-550 prairie rifle and filled his cartridge case with the five silver bullets which Gunsmith Thimbler had given him for luck. Loading his pack with grub, carrying a tightly woven rabbit hair blanket covered with light waterproof canvas, he headed forth, riding Blight to find the outlaw rendezvous. He knew about where it must lie, over at the west side of the sand dunes down in the Bad Lands.

One man against five or six, nothing could have been more reckless, but Hudson did not count the odds now. In the Bad Lands, from crests of buttes and spreads of isolated prairies, he could keep his bearings by the north wall of Rascal River; and three hours west of his own cabin he recognized a two-butte gap as a likely Bad Lands pilot. Sure enough, he found a wide, shallow mouth where cattle and horse tracks converged, all southbound. The desperadoes knew that pursuit always stopped at the Rascal River, and below it they headed everything into the one trail.

Hudson found small bands of horses and bunches of cattle in many small flats, where grazing was good and water plentiful. He crossed the trail of a big band of sheep, several hundred of them, heading south and feeding as they traveled, probably to be shipped at the next east and west railroad which was two hundred miles down the line. In this country, somewhere, would be the scoundrel ranch outfit, hidden away in some remote reach of the Bad Lands.

Hudson left his horse in a narrow draw. He brushed out all the hoofprints, hid his saddle and camp equipment and, with his rucksack on his back, went still-hunting the outlaws. He had ceased being the hunted, turning hunter instead, and no game is more difficult, no sport more dangerous, than tracking outlawed men.

The sun was against him, for it was afternoon and he had to go west in order to cut the runway of the rascals. He was south of a long, badly broken ridge, the divide between the Rascal River and the south fork of the stream. He came to a wide, shallow trough of prairie which was covered by sage and bunch grass, and as he peered across this from a dry wash, he could see nothing in any direction to bid him pause longer than to make sure no horseman was in sight.

He started across the open and when he was nearly halfway, a third of a mile from cover in any direction, suddenly, nearly south of him in the renewal of the broken lands, he saw a flock of black birds —crows or ravens, he couldn't be sure which—circling above one of the draws. He threw up his binoculars and in the flight recognized his white raven on the instant.

"*Bock!*"

He heard a shot, and then several others followed in quick succession.

The ravens instantly scattered, mounting higher in the air and flying away, the big white fellow swerving as he raced.

Hudson glanced around; the nearest cover was up the grade to the northward. Racing at top speed, he dashed for the shelter. He glanced back over his shoulder and as he drew near the Bad Land

breaks, he saw the alkali dust fog as a band of horsemen came into view. Stooping low, he bounded twenty or thirty yards to a point, and ran into a defile. This was an old buffalo migration trail; it had been used in cattle drives before the new railroad was built; and now, in the old runway, the trapper saw the tracks of shod horses, and knew by them that the outlaw humans still used the cañon pass on their way from Squarehead to their hidden ranch.

He looked back when he reached cover. The horsemen had not quickened their gait, so he knew he had not been seen. On the run he headed through the pass, not sure how long it was; but it proved to be less than a quarter of a mile. On the far side he had only to climb a few feet up a wall, impassable for horsemen, and stretch out on a narrow hogback behind brush, to wait for the outlaws to ride into his own rifle sights. The big .50-110-550 rifle had been a heavy load to pack, but well worth the effort—now.

The five horsemen rode into view, not a hundred yards distant. Booksey Malley, Skep Dawder, O'Bale and two other men, only one of whom Hudson had seen at the Mustang, came plodding through the pass. They passed the man in ambush not thirty yards away, utterly unconscious of the stalker.

"White ravens are bad luck," Booksey was saying. "They are always friendly with doctors of the Black Arts. They understand and talk human language. That old boy we shot at didn't mean any good for us, I can tell you that. I leave it to the books if he didn't have it in for us!"

Hudson had his rifle leveled, and O'Bale drew ahead as they passed. Two rode into the sights of the big buffalo rifle, both in line. The trapper had the chance of a lifetime to kill two men at once, outlaws who had passed on him the sentence of death . . .

But Kit Hudson couldn't do it. His breed did not belong with those who stoop to murder from ambush. Until this time, he had supposed he would rejoice at this opportunity he had won fairly by good wildcraft, but he refused to descend to the outlaw's own shameless and despicable plane of cowardice. He knew that should it be their fate to catch him thus exposed, they would shoot him down from behind and regard it as cunning and good business. Nevertheless, he let them go.

WATCHING them on their way, he saw them cross a shallow little creek where they watered their mounts, still in sure range; and then they rode on over the divide, around a point, Skep Dawder stopping in the gloaming to look around uneasily, his rifle ready, searching the skyline as though he felt the burning gaze of the Governmant trapper—who would rather chance being shot down from behind than take an unfair advantage, and descend from the proud estate of a man of honor and ideals.

The five riders were out of sight at last; they loomed after a time like shadows against the northern sky on another rise, and then finally disappeared on their way down into the valley of the main branch of the Rascal, to ride in the night to Squarehead.

Hudson now took the chance that no one would be at the hidden ranch of the outlaws. He headed on their back trail in the starlight, struck the far side of the big open slope where they would have caught him in the late afternoon, five to one, if he had not seen the ravens circling over their heads.

The band had come due east in a narrow draw, and only a few hundred yards up this Hudson came into a circular basin set with clumps of cottonwoods, pines and cedars; and on the far side on a bench with a spring waterhole heading a little brook, or run, was the nester-like outfit.

The cabin, stable, corral were all of cottonwood logs, and all was dark. Hudson felt the place was unoccupied. Silently he crept to the door, slipped the latch string softly and entered, his revolver in hand. The room was still warm, the odor of fried venison recalled his

hunger. Brushed back in the fireplace were hot ashes and a few red coals. A large brass coal oil lamp with a round burner hung over the long X-legged table, and he lighted it.

The first thing he saw clearly were the tails of a score of animals. Among them, all together, he recognized the plumes of five gray wolves. Hanging along the wall at one corner were bunches of traps, mostly No. 4 Kangaroo Jumps, but there were several No. 5 black bear and big wolf traps, and a number of No. 415 and 415-X's for similar hides.

Hudson had to laugh, though wryly, as he turned from the tails that had been bobbed to a row of books on a split plank shelf—a string of thirty titles or more: "The Golden Bough"; "Grimm's Fairy Tales"; "Human Animals"; "Vampires and Vampirism"; "Animism"; "Superstitions and Origins"; "Indian Myths"; "Beliefs of Nations"; "Instinct vs. Science", and so on through folklore and weird beliefs and ideas.

Spread on the wall was a university sheepskin, nailed at the corners to cottonwood logs—a bachelor's degree; and this had been used as a mark, torn by bullets to show Malley's contempt for his education.

The Government trapper wanted to laugh, but couldn't. Never had he seen anything so difficult to laugh off as that wasted intelligence, the shameless resources of a cultured man to cover his crimes by playing on the ignorance, superstitions and fears of poor, bedeviled humans. Booksey Malley had trapped coyotes and wolves, cut their tails off and turned them loose with crippled paws, faced by the inevitable necessity of preying chiefly on easy domestic creatures, or mobbed venison. Having had their lessons in steel traps, the bobtailed beasts were, of course, far and away too cunning to be taken that way again.

"What shame and humiliation could have degraded Malley," Hudson wondered. "What hurt had warped his intellect and turned him into an outlaw?"

Nonplused, Hudson circled back to Blight and brought the horse to the cabin stable, where he fed him well from a bag of grain. Cooking supper, he read for awhile and then slept with one eye open—but no one came. At dawn the morning wind was whistling out of the northwest, cold and raw. When he rode away, he was careful to cover his tracks, and fine snow flakes were eddying down over the Bad Land cliffs, increasing as the clouds thickened. The storm was heavy when he arrived at his own cabin, where he blanketed his horses and made sure of their comfort.

The bobtailed wolves were due again to come around on their circuit. The cold was intense, the comfort of the cabin fireplace alluring, and the instinct to doze during the blizzard was nearly overwhelming. Hudson was tired, sleepy, worn after his vigil in the outlaw rendezvous, but as he cleaned his firearms, he knew he must go forth on the infinitesimal chance of getting the wolves. He pulled on his heavy overclothes, fur cap, and swung his big mitts on a string over his neck.

The carbine .25-35 was slick and dull from a thin coat of oil, and with a laugh at his own absurdity, Hudson put six silver projectile shells into the magazine, one into the barrel.

With fur lined moccasins on his feet, he headed into the storm toward mid-afternoon, turning west and climbing over the point opposite Howling Butte—which was whimpering in the eddying winds—rather than wade up the gravel rifts, now clotting with floating snow. Skirting southward along the edge of the sand dunes, he came to a deep box cañon with walls a hundred feet high, quite perpendicular, and out of which the snow was driving into his face.

HE FOUND a seat amid buffalo brush in a niche in the stone. He sat out of the wind, where he could watch the cañon and along the cliffs at the edge of the dunes, though able to see but dimly in the scuds of flying snow. Snug, with the

snow whitening him, he waited, the tune of the blizzard in his ears. The bobtails were due. Usually they ran at night, but on a day as dark and blustery as this they were apt to be romping. The band had come down this cañon occasionally, and they might choose to ride its blasts today.

A coyote, caught hungry by the storm, came prowling by in lean flanked disgust, seeking a jackrabbit or even cottontail; six feet from the watcher the beast caught a whiff of the tainted air, rose straight up on its hindlegs in terror, and then raced away with its tail between its legs, the man's jeering laughter in its ears.

Two steers came down the cañon, ousted by the gale, and swung along the bluffs down the wind, lifting their hoofs and pumping their heads, icicles in their thick hair. Coming night darkened the skies and gloom folded down in deepening layers. In his sheltered comfort, Hudson relaxed in ease, delighting in the experience. A blizzard is a great companion for a man who loves the wilds.

Suddenly on the wind came a new sound. Starting alert, his hands on his carbine ready, tensely Hudson cocked his ears to the uproar of wind, the lisping of iceflakes rattling upon one another, the whining of the bush branches and the vibrating of the low, gnarled cedars, through which struck a new melody—the yelping and laughter of a wolf pack running free in the blizzard; big, wanton, careless wolves!

Hudson knew their cry: Moon Foot, Slipper, Bounder— He rose, hands bare, ready with his carbine pointed and his thumb on the cocked hammer! No moment in all his wildcraft experience quite equaled this as he stood confident, exulting and determined, cool with the long discipline of striving to meet the rising tides of life's emergencies.

A glimpse as of a shadow, lost in the blizzard dimness, fleet ghosts as indistinct as memories of the dark, and then the full throated music of the pack, running for fun in the storm, burst upon his ears; opposite him, wraiths in the Arctic mists, he saw plunging down on his forepaws, Bounder, and at his shot the beast went limp and flopped headfirst, head over heels in the snow. At his side, just beyond and unseen, another creature bounded and the same bullet pierced Slipper, who stopped short, legs stiff and paws plowing the sand and snow, coughing with head down, blood gushing from her jaws, astonished by death.

Hudson saw the double hit of the silver bullet—no time to exult. Another shot, like a snap, yet never was an aim more deliberately taken, threw Moon Foot over on his side, to scramble and fall again. Two more quick shots and the bobtailed pack were done for, the last one walking a few steps, turning around three times and then lying down to rest, to sleep, curling up instead of sprawling out in the icy blasts that now chilled the perishing, trembling frame.

The Government trapper stood weakly, staring at the five gray wolves which were fallen within thirty feet of one another, the wind lifting their limp furry hair, and the snow whitening them. There they were, all five of the outlaw pack, done to death in four shots within the space of no more than three seconds, probably. That had been his big job and now it was finished.

Here were the wolves that had been crippled in traps, maimed to give them an infamous reputation and turned loose by an educated scoundrel to ravage domestic flocks so that he could steal and rob, shifting the blame to wild beasts!

Hudson dragged the carcasses into the windbreak and slit them for quick case-skinning before they froze. At the heads he unjointed the skull from the spine and he left on the paws, unjointed the bent, crippled bones of the legs and feet, and having made the five thickly furred pelts into a pack with the inevitable white line coil from his pocket, he strode for camp through drifts and over the wind swept ground, singing the happy song of good hunters.

Coming into his own valley, he worked his way to the hidden cabin and, having shaken out his storm suit, he basked before the fire on his blazing hearth, watch-

ing hot biscuits coming brown in the Dutch baker, listening to the thick venison steaks scorching in the hot pan on its own little red bed of coals, and feeling the flaring comfort as the leaping tongues of flame snaked, spark headed up the sucking chimney.

Let the blizzard blow! Let the snow fall deep! Let the flakes sweep the prairies to fall cascading over the bluff brinks to come resting to the Rascal bottoms in enormous drifts!

The Government trapper would not sleep for triumph that night. The cabin was strong with the asafetida of the outlaw pack—two dogs, two two-year-olds, and the bitch that had led them. Hudson had work to do, stretching the pelts on long, narrow iron frames and then fleshing the white skins with care, down to the paws.

"I'll group them—" he chuckled. "They'll make a great scene in the Smithsonian—the Bone Nest Prairie Outlaws, shot by Kit Hudson, Government trapper, December 9, 1928, in a blizzard!"

A few hours before he had dillied and dallied with the thought of going out, taking a hundred, a thousand to one chance, leaving a cosy fireside of slothful ease for the certainty of bucking a terrific freezing gale. Had he yielded to the temptation to kill that passing coyote, the great game would have heard the shot and ceased their wild careless romping in the storm to sneak for cover. Step by step, patiently, he had come down the line of education, book learning, science, practical effort, through absurd assignment, clandestine hatred, dangerous enmities and mysterious circumstances to this success.

He hung the great iron stretches by their noses to cabin rafter wires and to each one he attached the tail which Booksey Malley had cut from it when he trapped the beasts.

Hudson sat down and wrote the details of his triumph. The white skin side of the fresh hides, with the .25-35 bullet holes in their shoulders, were needed to reassure him of his actual success. All done, the last word written, he shivered as a chill eddy of the blizzard swirled in the tight cabin.

Suddenly, his taut nerves relaxed and the weariness of the months long effort gripped him. He had actually destroyed the rogue wolves. His campaign was finished. The blizzard was now an excuse for indolence!

True, he must gather up his trap sets. He must clean each steel instrument, record its service, grease each hinge and coat every surface with enamel, preserving the Government property. Before the blizzard was over he would take in the near sets and pack most of his duffle for standard bundle shipment.

He hardly gave thought to the human rascals who still lurked in the background, their grim cunning now exposed. That, Hudson surmised, would be taken care of by a tip mailed to Sheriff Hackney, regarding the stolen stock cached deep in the Bad Lands south of the Rascal River, and the county officials could do the rest . . .

CHAPTER XIV

THE LAST RUN

THE BLIZZARD roared and flared. Under every prairie lee deep drifts accumulated, especially at the foot of the high bluffs along the north side of the Rascal valley where the gale had a clean sweep over the open, rolling range clear to the Creeping basin. Kit Hudson watched the snow flowing over the brinks to drop like a waterfall of frozen mist to the ground beneath. The bunch grass, sage brush, weeds and shrubs caught the drift over the rolling plains and the dark earth turned white. To feed his horses the trapper cut young cottonwoods in the flats and the animals browsed with hearty appetite. Blanketed with wool under waterproof canvas, they too seemed to delight in the gale.

One night the storm blew itself out and the stars sparkled where the clouds had lowered as they hurtled past. The sun

rose next day in a sky so clear that the blue was crystalline and blinding, the very colors of the heavens that of a gem flashing.

Hudson had dragged in the wolf carcasses and hung them in the cottonwoods through whose branches their howls had echoed with the winds.

The bell shaped Howling Butte was hung about and decorated by the fluffs of white crystals, whose reflections were pure gem colors. Hudson studied the island, its strange formation now marvelously revealed in fluted columns, deep black holes of shadow, blue, lilac and emerald reflections, and royal purple and sapphire-blue shades from the sun.

Caves, tunnels, slits and crevices stood revealed, the tubes of the great Eolian harp through which the east wind blew to make music in the storms now were clearly revealed. The man had regarded the structure with only casual interest, but now when a warm breeze came from the morning sun the Howling Butte began to wail and groan, shrill whistles and screams accompanied by the baying undertone like a deep voice in a squealing pack.

For the first time Hudson went to the formation to study the lie of the holes and chutes which served as pipes, and the crossflows whose impinging made the whistles and uproars. Crossing the ice to the Butte, he noticed one tall, narrow slot and, climbing steps of stratification, he walked along a narrow ledge, kicking away the snow, and entered a tall, narrow French window arched over his head, came into a real cave—a room with slightly undulating floor and high ceiling.

Striking a match, he saw cords of driftwood chopped into four-foot lengths on one side, and at the end he saw a natural fireplace with kettles, andirons, two trammel hook posts—a white man's outfit. On a stone bench ledge was a layer of several beef hides and an old buffalo robe on which was stretched a human figure, lying face downward.

He hastily built a bright, dry wood fire and looked more closely. The body was withered, mummified, and wore a tawny antelope buckskin shirt. Through the right side was a bullet hole. He had been shot in the back, and had come to the cave across the floor where the stains of the wound drips still were visible. In a big revolver holster was a weapon from which one bullet had been fired, and the remaining bullets were exactly like the one Hudson had picked from among the remains of the dead man he had found in the cabin he used for headquarters.

The cabin scoundrel had shot this man from behind, missing with two bullets. Wounded to death, the old fellow had turned and at that the assassin had fled—but on the way had caught his own mortal wound. Just another old-time frontier tragedy, harking back to the '80s or '90s, probably, Hudson thought, as he looked about on this cavern, prying into its secrets.

When the discoverer's glance ran along the walls of the cave, he saw above one shelf of stratified stone a too regular stretch of brick-like flat pieces of stone. He went to verify his observation and when he had pulled out those man stacked slabs, behind the little wall he saw canvas and rawhide bags. In each of the pokes were handfuls of gold coins, fives, tens, double-eagles, and in one a strange stack of octagonal coins, stamped fifty dollars, with California and private company mintings; and in three bags were more than ten pounds of Confederate States gold.

He turned back to the figure lying on the stone couch, staring at it.

"Prairie Catone's father!" he exclaimed.

RE-STACKING the stones around the treasure, Hudson left the place as it was, deciding that he would bring down a party, including the old man's daughter, and the proper authorities.

Hudson left the cave and brushed out his tracks in the snow, the thawing east wind helping to cover his trail. The Rascal River was already rising and melting snow was running in the washes, as if an

unseasonable Chinook had come. The thin snow of the prairies was cut away.

The Government trapper made up a pack, hanging the skins of the five bobtail wolves, fluffy fur side out, on top, with an air of negligence, feeling embarrassed by his boyish pride. Yet he knew that that display would forever break the spell of black magic the intellectual pervert, Booksey Malley, had cast upon the pathetically ignorant people of the region.

Hudson added another touch to the outfit before he pulled out. Bringing out the big prairie rifle, with its old buffalo bull leather scabbard and a shoulder bag for the ammunition, he swung it on the left side of Blight; on the right side he hung his modern .25-35 carbine, and in case of a northwester, he carried his fur suit in the oilskin at the back of his saddle.

Deep in thought, carried along by Blight, his lightly laden pack animal ahead of him, Hudson hardly looked around as his mounts led for town.

Suddenly thought of Malley and his gang struck him. In the satisfaction of the wolf kill Hudson had nearly forgotten them. He stiffened, threw up his head in sudden alertness.

On the instant right at his hand came a terrific *thwack* and Blight collapsed between his knees. Hudson sprang clear as he heard a shot and another high velocity bullet smacked past him, followed by a showering flight of projectiles. Dropping clear instinctively, Hudson reached for a rifle sheath as he caught sight, over his shoulder, of five men across a depression in the prairie, all having jumped from their horses to shoot at him. He did not need to know who they were.

With immeasurable satisfaction he felt the old-time prairie rifle in his hands. He opened the ammunition bag and pulled a brass tube with a long, patched slug in one end, a copper cap in the other, slammed it into the chamber, set the sights for a hundred rods and stretched on the sod.

When he pulled the trigger, modern semi-smokeless powder made a faint mist and strong odor which the wind whipped away. Loading again, as he raised his rifle for another shot, the man at whom he had aimed was flung backward—and another slug went on its way. The tall, slim figure at the left end of the line whirled around and fell, his legs twisting like ropes.

Thereupon the other three stopped shooting, turning as one man to throw themselves into saddles and ride away for life. Hudson slammed in another shell, took a bit coarser sight and made allowance for a kittering course, and fired again. Watching as he loaded, when he pulled his sights up to one hundred and twenty-five rods, he saw the rider he had aimed at lifted bodily out of his saddle. Across the wind he heard a yelping of fear—high, involuntary and wolf-like.

Slowly Hudson swung to shoot again, this time at one going straight away, climbing a long grade, the wet earth slippery and the horse scrambling awkwardly. At the arrival of the bullet man and horse went sprawling headlong.

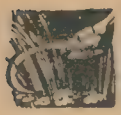
The remaining outlaw zig-zagged his horse, and though Hudson could see his bullets splash the prairie mud here and there around the fellow, presently he was silhouetted for two or three jumps over a wave-like crest and raced out of sight unhurt.

Tears rushed to Hudson's eyes as he turned, then, to look at his beautiful horse, whose neck had been broken.

He grew sick with nausea. How long he was victim of his agitation he could not tell. The sun had traveled far in the sky when he recovered. The packhorse was nibbling the curly grass fifty yards away. Hudson headed over to the men he had shot down; he needed one of their horses.

When he arrived he found Skep Dawder, O'Bale of the Mustang—the first one he had shot—and Heyden, and one man he did not know. Booksey—had escaped.

Looking around, Hudson caught glints of the sun shining on the empty shells of the repeating rifles, Skep's .405, like a small cannon, had thrown the cased bullet which had killed Blight. A .50-550 had been the deadly answer.



HUDSON could not bring himself to pack his victims on their horses. Accordingly, taking O'Bale's mount, which was nearest, held by dragging bridle reins, he returned to his packhorse and, as fast as he could, rode to Squarehead.

He rode along the main street of the town at a tired gallop, the horse's hoofs throwing mud. The town had seen him coming and along both sides on the walks were lines of people, hundreds of them. This was Monday, trading day, and it was still early, not quite time to start for home. At the railroad station Hudson swung down from the saddle and entered. Miss Keynote was sitting with clasped hands at her table, the keys clicking. She started up and cried aloud—

"Oh, they didn't get you, did they!"

He stopped short, staring at her, his face pale and drawn.

"Booksey's gang rode down to kill you!" she cried. "I sent for the sheriff—he's coming on a speeder. He'll protect you!"

"He'd better pick up a coroner," Hudson said, dryly. "It's an inquest job—"

"You—they *found* you?" She stood, staring, as she caught the significance of his statement.

"We met on the prairie," Hudson answered, his voice tired. As people came running to the waiting room, he added, "We shot it out, and I won."

The girl ran from behind the counter and threw her arms around his neck, eyes bright with tears. Then she hastily composed herself as the crowd swarmed around, City Marshal Weygan in the lead.

"Howdy, Hudson," he greeted. "See you're riding O'Bale's horse—how come?"

"Dawder killed mine," Hudson answered, and briefly told what had happened. The speeder arrived with Sheriff Hackney.

"Where are they, Hudson?" he asked. "Just this side of Signal Butte? Sag in the prairie there, isn't there? Always been a rustler's runway through there into the Rascal bottoms. Good place to watch for them, if you know they're riding."

"Yes, they hit the Rascal at the west line of the sand dunes," Hudson said. "Had an outfit up the south fork of the Rascal. More than a thousand head of cattle winter feeding—different brands."

"Some of the folks'll get their stock back, then," the sheriff said. "We'll tend to that."

"What d'ye know 'bout that!" Bud Bersch, the old rancher, shouted. "Gov'-ment trapper, too! An' he's got them wolfs, too—tails an' all!"

Every one yelled. As the shouts died away, a strange chant began and the Doukhobors who had come to town that day drew together and began to march down the street, singing, wailing—not sorrowfully now, but jubilantly.

"How'd you get them?" Hackney asked. "Shoot?"

"Oh, yes," Hudson answered, seriously. "Silver bullets—"

The crowd gathered around the packhorse at a respectful distance. Hudson loosened the latigoes and spread out the folded hides, and held one for the sheriff and Bersch to take, but the rancher jumped six feet backward.

"Not much would I touch the damned thing!" Hackney, too backed away. "I ain't superstitious *but*—"

"I am!" Miss Keynote laughed, folding the five pelts to her bosom while the onlookers cheered.

When he could, Hudson told the girl about the wolf tails in the desperadoes' cabin, and together they went to tell Prairie Catone the fate of her father, killed in a fight with a bushwhacker who had shot from behind.

"Wish you'd tell her," Hudson said. "I want to see the gunsmith."

"Why should I?" the girl inquired.

"I'm afraid Prairie'll be grateful," he explained.

"You know," the girl said, "I do believe you have a lot of consideration for my feelings, haven't you?"

"No one else anywhere has nearly so much!" Hudson said with candor.

Who could know the price he paid?

IVORY

By LEO WALMSLEY

THE CANOES came round a bend in the river, furtively hugging the western bank where the falling shadows lay. There were three—in line. Almack was in the last. He sat on a bundle of skins in the stern, a loaded rifle across his thighs; and his long sinewy legs reached out uncomfortably along an immense elephant tusk, too big to be packed in with the rest. His eyes, deep sunk in a gaunt and utterly wearied face, stared with a feverish excitement past the sweating back of the nearest paddler.

Beyond the heavy breathing of the toiling negroes, the plop of their paddles, and the sleek stir the canoes made, there was no sound. The air was heavy, hot, without motion. The forest stopped abruptly at the river banks. Its trees, erect and immense, gave the illusion of two cliffs falling sheer to the narrow laminated ribbons of reeking black mud, shutting out all winds, and all of the sky save a narrow strip of blue, stained with the faint gold of the swiftly setting sun.

South, to where the canoes were so furtively yet hurriedly moving, the river took another sharp bend. A barrier of smoothly worn boulders, in which driftwood had caught, arrested the languid current, making a long and apparently inert pool reflecting the forest cliffs and the strip of sky in a perfect inversion that was wrinkled into fantastic shapes when the canoes suddenly left the shadows and steered out to the midstream rocks.

Almack stood up and steadied himself with one knee against the canoe's gun-

wale. The excitement in his eyes increased as he looked beyond the barrier. The canoes slowed down—stopped. A deep sigh, more of pain than relief, came in unison from the negroes as they drew their paddles on board and, too exhausted even to slake their parched mouths with the water so near them, dropped their heads on to their heaving chests and sank into what might have been a hopeless and stoic passivity.

Only the patriarchal Arab in the bows of the leading boat remained alert. He stood up and, following Almack's agitated, excited stare, whispered hoarsely:

"*Bwana n'kubwa*, it is the place I spoke of. We are well beyond the limits of Ogari's country. Here is Masala's, which is a country of peace and just customs, and the warriors of Ogari would not dare to enter save in great numbers. We are safe now."

Almack still gazed to the south. The rocks continued out of sight, falling away rapidly, and what stream was visible among them moved and gurgled in languid eddies.

He spoke calmly, but as though he were carefully guarding the outward expression of a profound emotion.

"How far is it, Selima, to where the river is passable again?"

The voice of the patriarchal Arab started on a persuasive note.

"Half a day's march, *bwana*, for a man who carries nothing. A day for one who is loaded. On the west bank there is a path. It is the same which leads direct to Ogari's chief village, touching the river at this point before leading deep through the forest to avoid the river's winding. If we spend the night on the bank, an hour before dawn the canoes can be unloaded. By sunset of tomorrow they can be loaded again where the river is passable. There will be no more halts until Koroni, where the smoke-boat waits."

Impatience seemed to break through Almack's guard.

"Ogari is finished with," he said. "His men would turn back at noon after their last attack. It is the river we must fear. It is falling hourly. For how long will the river beyond remain passable? A night halt, and we may be delayed again in the shallow water. It is the last voyage of the smoke-boat from Koroni until the rains begin again, in three months."

The old Arab pointed to the nearest boulder swelling up like the back of an immense hippopotamus from the water.

"*Bwana n'kubwa*," he pleaded, "the men can not march tonight. See the marks on the rock? The river falls, but as evenly and certainly as the setting of the sun. Well do I know this river. A whole day's rest I would not advise. A night's rest for the men, and the water beyond will still remain passable. A man may do no more than Allah gives him strength for. Tomorrow they will be rested, and eager to continue. Have pity on their weakness, master."

A bitter, ironic laugh suddenly escaped Almack's lips. He turned abruptly, and moved as though he would kick the naked buttocks of the nearest negro, then shake him by the throat until fear again moved him from that physical inertia. But the anger went from his eyes as quickly as it had come. No pity took its place, however.

HE HAD forgotten what pity was the last five days. He had driven the men on without mercy. Driven them when even the fear of Ogari's warriors, and their treacherous arrows—which in the first fight had killed four men out of one canoe—had ceased to spur their efforts.

It was not pity which caused him to give now a sign of acquiescence to the patriarchal Arab and point to the western bank. His decision sprang from a cold, dispassionate consideration of an economic fact. The men were nearly exhausted. He might drive them on tonight. He might even get the canoes loaded and make a start again by dawn. Remained still another three days of hard paddling to Koroni, and the waiting steamer; and if they collapsed again no power on earth

would extract another effort from them.

"We shall land now," he said, in even tones. "There is still light. Before the men rest they will unload the ivory ready for the morning. *Haiya!*"

He was himself the first to set foot on the evil smelling mud and, rifle in hand, to walk, rather unsteadily, up the bank and enter the cavernous shadows of the forest. There was light enough reflected from the river to see that the ground was cleared and to distinguish the avenues of a path leading south, and then northwest. The forest was curiously quiet. When he turned from that swift reconnaissance, there was a definite relief in his eyes; and he stood against a tree trunk at the edge of the mud cliffs so that he could watch the process of unloading. In his dispassionate contemplation of an economic fact he had judged to a nicety the moral effect of the promised night of rest. The men had taken a new lease of life. Already a dozen elephant tusks were piled, musket fashion, in the middle of the proposed camping ground.

The sight of that palely gleaming ivory brought a sudden fierce satisfaction to Almack's heart. He ventured for the first time to contemplate his treasure in the light of achievement and success. He was going to win. Nothing must happen now to despoil him of the hard earned fruits of victory. He could place an implicit faith in that old Arab's wisdom. The margin of safety was small—but he had gambled with such margins from the first . . . And now with the biggest stake of all thrown boldly on the wheel of fortune he was going to win.

An honest gamble, though, he told himself, with peculiar pride. He was going back with clean hands. Love demanded that. He would be able to look into Helen's eyes and, without a reservation, tell her of all that had taken place since they had said goodby nearly a year ago.

He was profoundly glad to think that she was the sort of woman to whom such things were of supreme account. There were many ways of making money in the country if a man was not too particular: but Almack had no desire to go back to Helen with his hands dirty . . .

He knew that far above her physical beauty, it was her lofty idealism, her unshakable integrity that made the solid foundation of their love. He knew that from the first it was that which had been his inspiration, an unfailing source of strength through all the trials and disappointments of the past ten months. Could he have suffered Ogari otherwise?

At the thought of Ogari Almack's brow furrowed. But in this temporary exalted state of mind he could contemplate Ogari with a perfect equanimity. There was some quality about him which made him now, with the danger of him past, a worthy protagonist; which gave an added zest to this sense of nearly won victory. The reputation of that crafty, avaricious old potentate was a byword in the land. A white man crossed the borders of his country, if not at the certain peril of his life, then certainly at the risk of being fleeced by taxes, and other tributes, of everything that he possessed; and if his reputation for barefaced murder had become less evil with his advancing years, it could be said that no white man had ever established himself on a friendly footing in the royal court, or left Ogari's country the richer by a single tusk.

TRUE that from the first Almack had been favored with a singular good fortune. He had marched into Ogari's head village with a gambler's hope of bluffing the sultan into a bargain, obtaining permission to hunt and trade in ivory, at the not too extortionate price of twenty loads of very tolerable silk, and cotton goods, brass wire, tools, and jewelry. He had found the sultan desperately ill, with three witch doctors in attendance and promising to bring about his very swift demise. A bottle of castor oil had worked a miracle. Also it produced a friendship which Almack, however, even then had realized might have its embarrassing aspects.

Not that Ogari's gratitude at first had been insincere. For the first month indeed the gifts he flung upon his benefactor—in return for the most formal presents—would have filled a dozen canoes. He might hunt where he wished. The royal trackers were to be placed entirely at his disposal. What tusks the natives themselves brought in, he might trade for at the merest nominal price. And the ceremony of blood brotherhood was actually performed before the old tyrant had left his sick bed. But in the very heartiness of that flattering friendship danger lurked like the hidden poison of a seeming luscious and benign fruit.

Almack shuddered.

Thinking about Ogari like this had brought things back almost too vividly. He took a step or two forward. It was now almost completely dark. But for the white gleam of the ivory they carried he could scarcely distinguish the toiling men.

He turned his face again and stared into the forest. The perfect silence of it which at first had given him a sense of peace and security had suddenly become ominous. Was the danger past? It was as though among the somber foliage had come a sudden vision of Ogari, with his thick, pendulous lips parted in an ingratiating smile, and his little beady eyes shining with greed, giving the lie to honeyed protestations of regard and disinterested friendship.

Was the danger of Ogari past? There could be no doubt of the implacable fury now raging in that savage breast. Almack had outwitted him, matched cunning against cunning, planned, plotted, bribed; found helpers even among the highest of the sultan's personal retinue. He had, with their assistance, formed caches of that bought and hunted treasure—which Ogari had never really intended him to possess—deep in the forest and near the banks of a tributary stream. The canoes had been smuggled up at night and concealed in a papyrus swamp. His own original bodyguard of irregular soldiers had been warned to be in readiness. Their muskets, which Ogari—in the professed name of security—had removed from them long ago and stored in the royal armory, were smuggled out of the palace. Despite a raging bout of that fever which was making Almack's stay in the forest a matter of gravest danger, he had kept to the plan, and their departure had taken place without a hitch.

That in itself was enough to fire in Ogari an unquenchable spite. And to add more fuel to it the warriors he had sent in hot pursuit to cut the canoes off had been repulsed in the first attack with heavy loss, and successfully beaten off up to their last half hearted effort on the borderland of their lord's domain seven hours ago.

Was the danger past? Had that party, defeated and discouraged, given up the chase, fearing to carry it on into the territory of an unfriendly people?

As though in answer to that question a hoarse, derisive croak smashed the thick quiet of the forest. Almack swung round as though he had received a physical blow. But the startled curse on his lips broke into a half hysterical laugh as in the air above he heard the muffled beat of a cormorant's wings. His limbs were trembling, however. He was obliged to steady himself against a tree trunk.

He must get a grip of his nerves, he told himself fiercely. He was letting them go all to pieces. He was still very ill. The terrific strain of the last few days had brought him almost to the verge of positive exhaustion. What was there to fear? He was perfectly safe here for the night. In a few days he would be on board the river steamer at Koroni, with the ivory secure, Ogari and this detestable forest and its silent horrors consigned forever to the past, the future a splendid vision of health and happiness.

HIS SPIRITS rose. There would be letters from Helen there, the first for three months. He would be able to telegraph the certain news of his homecoming. She might even be waiting at the coast if the news arrived in time for her to catch a

steamer from Cape Town, where up to the date of her last letter she was living with friends. Within two months they would be married, settled on that farm which the ivory was to provide, life really beginning for them both . . .

Almack suddenly drew himself up stiffly. No, there was nothing to fear. Even if Ogari's warriors had the courage to pursue the chase there would be little fight left in them. He would take every possible precaution, too. No fires would be permitted. The men would sleep in turn. Half of the *askaris* must be sent out immediately so that the whole camp would be surrounded by a ring of sentries. He must see to that at once.

He turned in the direction of the camping ground. Instantly he heard the sound of approaching footsteps and the white robe of Selima moved specter-like toward him from the darkness. Behind him was the obscure figure of a man, breathing very heavily. Almack stopped in his stride.

"Selima!"

"*Bwana n'kubwa,*" a hoarse whisper answered him.

"There is something wrong?"

"*Bwana n'kubwa,* it is this man."

The Arab stepped aside and pushed the native forward. But it was too dark for Almack to discern more than the white gleam of the man's teeth, bared as he fought for his breath.

"A minute ago he ran into the camp," Selima went on quickly. "*Bwana n'kubwa,* he has escaped from Ogari's warriors, those who are pursuing us. He is a porter of a white man's *safari* traveling north. A white man with twenty *askari.* They captured this white man and eight of the *askari* who were not killed. *Bwana,* I have brought him for you to question."

Almack stared at the teeth gleaming in the darkness, with a curious sense of having received a severe blow, which for the time being had partially numbed him. There was no emotion in his voice when he whispered—

"It is true—this?"

"*Bwana n'kubwa,* all as the old man has said," the native whispered.

Almack continued just as steadily—

"Where did this happen?"

"Four hours along the forest path," the native whispered. "They fell on us without warning, shooting their poisoned arrows from the jungle. The white man fought bravely, but he stumbled in the thick grass and fell, and was seized and bound. Three only of the porters escaped. They ran to the west. I came this way for I am of Masala's people, and my home is a day's journey down the river."

Almack was still perfectly cool.

"Who is the white man?" he asked.

"I do not know," the native answered. "Two days ago he arrived from Koroni. He required porters for two months' *safari.* His *askari* were big, fierce men, and would not have been overcome if Ogari's men had not hidden in the jungle while they shot their arrows."

"It happened in Masala's country?"

"*Bwana n'kubwa,* six hours' march away. It was in Masala's army, but close to the borders of Ogari's. I have come in two hours running the whole distance. I would go on now to my village. Masala himself must be told of it, but his village is far to the west. Ogari's men will be in their own country now."

Almack paused slightly before speaking again, but when he did so it was still in a perfectly steady whisper.

"You think they will be marching still, taking their prisoners with them?"

"*Bwana n'kubwa,*" the native answered, "I do not think so. They looked like men who had traveled a far way. Had we been prepared we would have beaten them off. There is nothing for them to fear until tomorrow. I think they would march a little way, then stop. Early tomorrow they will march again."

Almack did not speak again. He stood perfectly immobile, staring at the gleaming teeth, listening to the man's breathing, and the sound of the negroes dragging up the now empty canoes into the jungle ready for the morning's overland trek. The sense that he had received a numb-

ing blow persisted. Apart from that, however, his mind was perfectly alert, peculiarly dispassionate. He did not for the moment feel any need to question the man further. The story he had told had the ring of absolute sincerity. It was simple, too; amazingly simple. A white man traveling in what presumably was a peaceful country had fallen into the hands of a party of savages. They were savages who had been outwitted, physically beaten by himself. Their very presence in that peaceful country was due entirely to his own activities in arousing the hatred of Ogari.

This white man, whoever he might be, was, it seemed, for the time being safe. But it was equally evident that he would be taken to Ogari, and that Ogari, beside himself with rage at Almack's recent escape, would either murder him in cold blood, or at least keep him languishing in captivity until the climate achieved the same end.

What more was there for him to learn? Did it matter a jot who this white man was? Did that affect his duty?

HE SAW what that duty was with perfect mental clarity. He must go to the rescue at once, taking with him every man capable of the effort of marching. The rest, under Selima, would remain to guard the ivory as best they could—the ivory for which he had gambled a year of his life to win. If he were successful, he might by effort transcending everything he had yet done, bring the men back by tomorrow afternoon, and carry on toward the clear river. By that time it would have fallen so much that inevitable delays would bring him to Koroni too late to catch the steamer and, instead of reaching the coast in a month by an effortless route, he would be obliged to spend another three months in this pestilential country at the almost certain risk of his life.

Three months! God—*no!* It was as though a hand had clutched at Almack's throat. He felt the veins swelling, the sweat trickling down his throat and chest. The numbness had gone. He was aware at last of a pain that was intolerable.

"No, no!" he muttered through clenched teeth. He could not do it! That could not be duty. A man could not give up so much as that—it was asking everything, everything; more than life.

He took a step forward, and with a frightful curse brought his hands down on the shoulders of the terrified native.

"Get to hell out of it!" he shouted. "Get out—quick! What do you come to me for? Go to Masala. Go to Koroni—to the police! Is it my business saving the lives of fools?"

In the blindness of an overwhelming fury he was unaware that he was speaking English. He shook the man until his teeth rattled.

"Does your damned fool of a master expect me to turn round and save him? Can't you see that we've just come from Ogari's country, that every man's exhausted? Go back now—and miss the boat . . . Get out!—get out—!"

He gave the man a push and turned on the old Arab.

"What are you waiting for?" he shouted. "Are the canoes up yet?" He lapsed into the dialect, but his fury remained unabated. "We shall not make camp here. Tell the men that at once. They will have an hour's rest only. Then half of them shall start. There will be rest enough for them when we reach Koroni."

Before the old Arab had moved Almack swung past him. Half of the men were already gathered round the ivory, in the clearing, and at the outskirts of it a group was kneeling round a fire they had just lighted. He strode toward it. The men stood back. He kicked a heap of dried grass into the feeble, flickering flames, As it blazed up he swung round again and shouted:

"*Askari, yoti askari. Bunduki, upesi.*"

The message was repeated in terrified accents down to the negroes who were still hauling up the canoes.

In two minutes a ragged line of men

was formed up in front of the fire. Almack watched a straggler come limping in and take his place at the far flank. Then he moved closer, and halted, facing the ranks. There were thirty men in all, a taller and a finer breed than the porters. Although they had worked at the paddles with the rest, it seemed that with one or two exceptions, they had not drawn on their last reserve of strength. With an hour's rest, and a meal, and with the prospect of an end to all their sufferings, they might be extended at least to making one trip along the forest detour, each carrying sixty pounds of ivory. It would mean saving an hour on the morning's start; an hour's broadening of the margin of security.

Almack looked at them. He had only to say one word now, and these men would start on their march south—south, to where life awaited him. But he knew as he looked that he could not say that word. His rage had died. Something had possessed him more intense and enduring than the furies of disappointment and thwarted desire. His mind had become cool again, alert only to reality. A white man was helpless, wounded, in the hands of savages whose anger and brutal lust for vengeance he himself had roused. Could he, a white man, abandon that man?

The chances were a thousand to one that the native was right in his belief that Ogari's warriors would be spending the night not far from the place where they had fallen on the party. He stared with steady, calculating eyes which saw not the possibility of a brief, unhurried journey with these tired men, but a fierce march of fifteen miles, and then a desperate fight. And if doubts assailed him, they had no relation whatever to his resolution to make the attempt. Twenty at least of these men he could depend upon to the absolute limit of their physical endurance. Their arms were in order, they had ammunition and bayonets. Enough. He signed to these men to stand out from the ranks and close up.

To each man in turn he explained what was demanded of him. He turned to Selima then, and pointed to the ivory and the rest of the men. He did not exhort. His voice was unemotional, his instructions succinct. He was leaving at once. Selima was to take entire charge of the camp and the ivory until he returned, which probably would be at noon tomorrow. And if by chance he did not return, then in a day he was to start for Koroni, where to the white man in charge of the government station he was to explain all that had occurred.

"*Bwana n'kubwa,*" the old man answered in a bewildered voice. "It shall be done as you say. But the river—the river falls. It will be too late . . ."

But Almack had already signed to the fugitive porter to come close to his side, and he faced the twenty men.

"*Haiya,*" he said quietly. "We start."

THE FOREST was not so thick where they had halted. Stars gleamed among the high branches. Here and there was a clear patch of sky. But on all sides the darkness was scarcely less profound than that through which they had marched since they had left the river camp. The men, at Almack's whispered command to halt, had flung themselves on the ground. He had been obliged himself to fall on his knees, and he had remained in that attitude for a full minute before he got complete control of his breathing. But now he was standing, in the middle of the group, resting his weight on the muzzle of his rifle, with his head leaning forward and his eyes staring with a stolid intent to the north, where ten minutes before the fugitive porter had gone forward to reconnoiter what he believed to be the camping ground of Ogari's men, not more than two hundred yards away.

Almack, as he stared, was surprised at the complete detachment of his emotions. He had expected to feel now a complete reaction after the almost superhuman effort of the last seven hours. He had been afraid as much as anything of

fear; fear that after all he would neither have the courage nor the physical capacity to inspire his exhausted men, and lead them when the fighting came. Instead, the sense that he had received a frightful physical blow had returned until it seemed that his whole consciousness was under a peculiar narcotic influence, which left it nevertheless in its purely physical functions undaunted and alert.

Suddenly, from the darkness ahead came a slight stirring noise. Around him Almack heard the men rising, and the muffled sound of their arms. But even when a hand reached out and touched him, and invisible lips whispered hoarsely close to his face, his one emotion was that of mild surprise at his own absolute unconcern.

"*Bwana*, it is Ogari's men. They lie round a large tree, not an arrow's flight away. They sleep all save two who sit at a small fire, guarding the white man who is still bound."

"Good," Almack whispered back.

The *askari*, breathing a little less heavily after their brief rest, were already gathered round him. They were professional fighters, men to whom actual conflict was the salt of life, and its preliminaries only arduous and unpleasant. And Almack in the course of the march had explained what tactics they were to pursue. Bayonets only, and the bayonets were already fixed.

He took the van himself with the native walking close by his side. He was cool, alert, completely unemotional. He had no hope, no doubt, no fear, no anger. To him at that moment, the man for whom he had jeopardized his life's ambition, probably life itself, was as wholly objective as the savages who held him. He had no more emotional desire to see that man safe than he had to see the savages killed.

Even when that shout of warning came, and the invisible camp had roused to arms, even when that sound was echoed by a derisive battle cry from the men at his side, and he leaped ahead, no sound escaped his lips but a clear and steady "Charge!" followed by an equally steady, "No shooting!"

Yet he was the first to reach the outskirts of the camp. He was the first to draw blood. By the light of a fire that had been kicked into life, he saw an immense negro rise up before him with a spear pointed. He dodged and bayoneted the man's shoulder without losing his stride. Two men were upon him before he had reached the center of the camp. One of them fell to an *askari's* bayonet, the other he caught in the stomach with the butt of his gun and sent staggering backward into the fire. There followed a minute of almost complete darkness. But on every side of him the air was filled with shouts and screams and the groans of dying men. He grouped his way along and found himself at a tree trunk. The fire blazed up again. He saw an *askari* rush at two of Ogari's warriors who were leaping into the forest. Before it had died and flickered again he was aware that the fight was over.

IT WAS with that knowledge that Almack's stunned brain awakened to a complete and agonizing consciousness. He saw the figure of a man lying on the ground not more than a dozen yards away. He was moving feebly, tearing at the thongs with which he was bound. And suddenly that man became for Almack the symbol of a fate which had inflicted an unendurable torture upon himself. He strode toward him, cursing. The fire failed as he drew near. He sank on to his knees and, groping, touched the man's body. He heard a muttered—

"Safe!"

He laughed aloud, and he was overwhelmed by an insane rage.

"Safe—by God!" he cried almost hysterically. "Yes, you're safe, damn you. Do you know what your safety's cost me? I've missed the last downriver boat through you. Damn you, I've got to live three more months in this rotten country just to save your life. Do you know how

many times a man can have blackwater fever and survive?"

He took out a hunting knife and, still cursing insanely, fumbled for the man's thongs—started savagely to cut at them.

"Yes, you're safe," he went on. "You needn't worry about that. You've got no ivory to lose. I've saved even your damned baggage for you."

He cut the last thong. He leaned back, staring savagely at the man, who was a man of middle age, with a deeply lined, sun weathered face, and a close cut military mustache.

"Who the hell are you?" Almack raved on. "Don't you know how to take care of yourself? Do you realize that the last steamer of the season leaves Koroni in four days and that I've missed it because of you?"

The man put a hand to the back of his head, and touched it gingerly.

"Don't know much about anything at present," he muttered unsteadily. "Head's spinning like a top. Seems you've saved my life. I'm grateful—for what you've done. What's that about the steamer? River steamer destroyed by fire three weeks ago. That's why I'm here. I'm the police commissioner of Koroni. Looking for a chap called—called Almack. White woman arrived a week ago. Motor launch. This chap's girl. She's been making a hell of a fuss officially. Almack's supposed to be—held prisoner—Sultan Ogari—"

The commissioner paused, arrested by the expression on Almack's face.

"What is it?" he cried. "Who are you? You haven't seen anything of this damn fool Almack? An elephant hunter. His girl's still at Koroni—with the launch. I've got a letter from her somewhere."

The man looked intently at Almack who had suddenly leaned toward him.

"Good Lord," he muttered. "You're not Almack, are you?"

"Yes." Almack answered in a curious voice. "I'd like to have that letter if you can find it."

WANDERLUST

By

C. WILES HALLOCK

If bungalows were sailing ships
  And boulevards were quays,
And story books were harbor nooks
  Of isles in all the seas . . .
If dreams were deeds and venturings
  And reading men might ride,
I'd leave the town when night is down
  To buck the running tide.

If taxicabs were caravels
  And teeming streets were straits
'Twixt fable lands and coral strands
  Where veiled adventure waits—
I'd cast away at dreamy dusk
  To buck the starry tide . . .
If story books were harbor nooks
  And reading men might ride!

The FIRE RACKET

A Story of the Chicago Underworld

By KARL W. DETZER

LIEUTENANT PEPPER O'BRIEN, Fire Engine Company No. 159, was born on Orange Street, where Little Athens, Little Italy and the Ghetto converge, but do not meet.

The west end of Orange Street is only the toss of a pineapple from the alley where Mrs. O'Leary's cow kicked her way into immortality. It is an obscure, dirty byway now. But for thirty years it has withstood the siege of foreign invaders; and today, in spite of their headlong march, it keeps its brogue and its brawling identity.

Pepper O'Brien was born in the third house from the corner. In the fifth house dwelt Little Ben Purley. And Little Ben, as half the world knows, was the big shot of the Badlands, the soft spoken czar of that howling wilderness which sweeps northward from the stockyards to West Madison Street. Little Ben was a dictator long before Mussolini folded his arms and scowled in Italy's face. Like all dictators he was ruthless. He was not concerned particularly with either the spirit or the letter of the law, and a dead enemy was his idea of a good enemy. Personally, he was unobtrusive; he abhorred publicity; he never drank, smoked, chewed, swore or married; he looked out for his friends and he kept his word.

There, if one questions his success, are the characteristics responsible for it. On the Gold Coast man may or may not keep his word, just as his conscience dictates. In the Badlands, either he keeps it, or some one with a flair for ethics takes him for a ride.

When Little Ben Purley promised John

Doe that he would be elected alderman, John Doe was elected. When he promised that Richard Roe would be sprung on a writ of habeas corpus before midnight, Richard Roe was sprung. If he promised peace in the Badlands, the miracle of peace descended out of the smoky sky. If he promised war, there was gunfire and the impotent rattle of patrol wagon bells in the night.

So when Pepper O'Brien was eighteen and Ben Purley said—

"I'll make a fireman outa you, son," there was no need for further discussion.

Pepper went up for physical examination, did his six months at drill school and was assigned as recruit to Engine No. 10. There he served his breathless apprenticeship, and was transferred to Truck 9. After three more seasons he went to Squad 1, and finally when he had labored nine years, one morning in May he pinned a lieutenant's single bugle on his cap and was assigned to command No. 2 shift on Engine 159.

He had not seen much of Ben Purley in these past half-dozen years. He was out of Ben's district, and there had been no need to see him. It was only when Little Ben wished a favor that he sent for a man, and a fireman in the ranks has few favors to grant.

But on the day Lieutenant O'Brien hung his new leather helmet, with its white shield, on the hook of his new crimson pumper, he saw Little Ben shuffle in the broad front doors of his company quarters, smiling and extending his right hand.

"Just wanted to shake," Purley said. "You're doin' fine, son. I been watching you. Helping you over the hard spots now and again, even sometimes when you didn't know it. I look out for my friends, eh, Pepper?"

"Sure," Lieutenant O'Brien agreed. It was true. Ben Purley looked out for a lot of people. He had bought coal once, a long time ago, for the O'Briens.

"It don't do to forget old friends," Purley said.

"No, it don't," Lieutenant O'Brien agreed. This, too, was true. But he wondered, a little uneasily, what favor Little Ben wanted.

"I was just passing," Purley told him. "There's a lad on this company that's a friend of mine. He'll be going up to lieutenant, too, one of these days. He'd of gone this time, only—" he lowered his voice— "there was just this one vacancy, and I wanted to push you."

Lieutenant O'Brien reddened. He was twenty-seven now, straight, wide of shoulder, with quiet blue eyes. Fire had tempered him in nine years. Responsibility had made his eyes thoughtful, smoke had tanned his skin, labor had made his hands large and capable. His hair, that once had threatened to be hose wagon red, had toned itself now to the color of an old calfskin binding. He looked like an officer.

"I stood first on my examination," he reminded Little Ben Purley quietly. He was proud of that fact. Politics had no part in his promotion.

Little Ben looked up at him sharply.

"What's that got to do with it? If you'd stood at the bottom, and on your head in the bargain, I'd of fixed it for you."

Pepper did not reply at once. He was a lieutenant. And Little Ben had started him in the fire business. Gratitude is next to godliness in the Badlands, where the O'Briens were born and Purley still lived.

"I'd of fixed it," Little Ben repeated.

"I suppose you would," Pepper said.

"There's no supposing," Little Ben retorted. "This lad I was telling you about—it's Bill Wolmar."

O'Brien grinned. Bill Wolmar would need help if he went far in the fire business.

"I'll not stand in his way," he promised. "Only, I can't do anything for him if he don't do something for himself."

"I think," Little Ben spoke quietly, "that you'll find it pays to push him along a bit."

O'Brien sobered. He didn't like Little Ben's tone in this last remark. In the

door, where they stood talking, he could see Ben's car standing at the curb. It was a custom built model, heavily reenforced with steel plates. Its glass was shatter proof, the kind that cautious banks put in around their tellers' cages. The driver sat confidently behind his wheel. Beside the car, lounging in apparent ease, hulked a broad shouldered giant with a face like a ham and red fists that hung six inches below his cuffs.

This was Little Ben's chief bodyguard. He was known as the Tamer, and it occurred to Pepper at the moment that his name, too, was Wolmar.

"Is Bill Wolmar related to the Tamer?" he asked suddenly.

"Sure," Little Ben admitted. "Blood brother."

"Oh—" Pepper said.

That was all. Purley shook hands again, patted his back, mentioned the weather and then drove away rapidly. The new lieutenant waited in the door, watching him as he climbed in beside the Tamer in the rear seat. The bodyguard turned, when the car jerked forward, and peered out cautiously through the back window. It was a habit of his. He was an excellent bodyguard.

LIEUTENANT O'BRIEN returned to the apparatus-room floor. He halted near the alarm stand with the air of a new proprietor and glanced about the room. The thousand-gallon pumper poised in the center over its flat drip pan. Helmets and gloves and slickers hung in place on the hose box, ready for action. The big nickel plated air chamber glistened in front of the radiator; under the air chamber crouched the multiple piston pump, its big black hard suction pipe swung in a graceful arc about the front, already screwed into place on the intake connections.

The pumper was clean, Pepper reflected, clean as the floor, clean as the polished glass cover over the box alarm instrument. A man could take pride in this engine company. And to date, at least so far as he could learn, politics had played no part in it. He had only been in the fire business nine years, but he had seen more than one company demoralized, more than one good officer ruined, when he took it into his head to play the political game.

"A hundred thousand majority on election night ain't worth a single hand pump when it comes to putting out fire," an old battalion chief once had told him; and he would always remember it.

It was true that Little Ben Purley had got him into the business. True he owed Purley for that start. True that Purley always looked out for his friends. But a fireman owed the department something, too.

Little Ben had been gone only an hour when the sputter of the joker alarm interrupted O'Brien's unpleasant thoughts. He swung around, listening. Three fives —alarm of fire—the urgent telegraph key snapped out. The instrument was bolted to the oaken stand against the wall and the burnished plank served as a sounding board, magnifying the crisp authority of the alarm. Three—one—nine . . . That was Truck 9 going out on a still. A fire close by. Just over the river, perhaps, on the new double deck drive. Perhaps this side of the river. At most not a mile away.

Three more fives—three—two. No. 32 was following. The Squad 1 and Patrol 1 next. Pepper stood, listening and watching, while the joker told its story in staccato cadences. His crew, who had been in the kitchen at noon dinner, paused, listening.

Pepper stepped around to the instrument while the key still rattled. He quickly lifted the receiver from the telephone hook. He heard other slight clicks as other company commanders up and down the city listened in. Then the voice of the operator at alarm headquarters, unexcited and casual. One could always tell by their voices that the operators never had to bunk out on a fire. They sat quietly in their offices. They could afford to keep cool.

"Wells and Austin—" the location came in. "Austin and Wells."

"We roll if they pull a box," O'Brien called back toward the kitchen.

There was an immediate clatter of knives and forks as his crew rushed through their meal. A box alarm would take a minute at least, and any good fireman can do half a meal in that time.

It was fifteen seconds beyond the minute when the box alarm slammed in over the tape that pushed through the slot in the glass dust cover. Eight dots . . .

O'Brien yelled—

"Here she is!" He heard chairs upset in the kitchen.

One dot—seven dots . . . Engine 32 and Truck 9 had cried for help.

O'Brien, from the front seat, watched silently while the men swarmed up to their places on the apparatus. Nolan, the driver, wiped his mouth on the sleeve of his shirt as he slid in behind the wheel on the right hand side. A good man, Nolan; good driver and good engineer. He had a reputation for sending plenty of water through his lines, giving his crew all the pressure they wanted, and all the volume, too. Halligan, senior pipeman, a snorting old man with his left cheek permanently pouched from the tobacco he carried there, took the tailboard at a leap, with the recruit, Dommy Clinch, scrambling up awkwardly beside him. Wolmar, a heavy, sullen man with blue, freshly shaven jowls, loped more slowly toward the step. Pepper watched him thoughtfully. The Tamer's brother didn't have the making of a fireman. Any six-month Johnny-come-lately could see that.

Gillen and Webster, a pair of old battlers, came last. They were still chewing pie as they jumped to the top of the box.

"Go," O'Brien ordered.

He felt a momentary lightness in his head and emptiness in his stomach. He was rolling to his first fire with his first command. It was seven blocks to Austin and Wells. Seven minutes. Seven cross streets. As he slashed the bell rope with his right hand, pressed the siren button heavily with his left, O'Brien found time to wonder. Why was little Ben Purley interested in making Wolmar an officer?

The Tamer was Bill Wolmar's brother. That might be adequate reason. But Bill was a poor fireman, and not much of a politician either. He was a trouble maker in the ranks. Ever since he joined Truck 9, five years ago, Bill Wolmar had stirred up discord. Once he had been accused of cheating at cards. Two or three times he had mentioned political pull. He had predicted promotion, when promotion did not materialize. Pepper wondered now whether Little Ben Purley had promised it and had failed. If so, it was one of Little Ben's few failures.

THE GREAT pumper swung west and rolled, screaming, into Austin Avenue. Other apparatus was charging ahead of it—two engine companies; a ladder truck; a crimson department ambulance. A cloud of blue smoke lifted from the pavement two blocks away. It rose quickly and disappeared against the blue-gray sky, and other clouds, darker, thicker, puffed out, and once a whip of flame slashed across.

"Gasoline," Nolan remarked through set teeth. "Damn it, that's gas."

Pepper stared for a moment, then turned on his seat, dropping the bell lanyard as the pumper roared toward the curb.

"Get set there, couple hard suction," he shouted to the men behind him. "Siamese yourself, double line, big and little, about fine length—ready to lay out." He leaped from the running board before the pumper ground to a halt at the curb.

Battalion Chief Jim Graham, a lean, straight nosed veteran who looked like a rector, was giving orders. He had left his fire hat on the seat of his buggy; and his bare gray head bobbed among the black helmets of hosemen laying line. His commands clipped sharply through his thin lips.

"Engine 159 reports, sir," O'Brien yelled.

He glanced at the fire; rolling up from a new one-story brick building. It was spitting out glass all along its front. Over the door he saw the sign in neat, gold letters: "Imperial Dry Cleaning." He heard the roar of blazing tanks within, the sputter of flaming gasoline.

"Engine 159, sir," he repeated; and added, "Lieutenant O'Brien commanding."

The battalion chief gave him no attention. The smother tank wagon had just pulled up. It was a new member of the fire apparatus family—still scowled on by old-timers—a pot bellied specialist in these days of specialists and gasoline. Its crew was running lines of inch and a quarter hard rubber hose from its chassis toward the door of the blazing plant. Chief Graham was coolly directing them —taking his time about it as if the whole block might not blow up any minute.

The white liquid shot out of the small tips of the red hose. It formed a heavy froth, like beaten marshmallow cream, wherever it struck—on the new brick front; on the windows, on the the sidewalk. It frosted one side of a lamp post and, finally turning brown, charged in through the smoke. Fire retreated.

"One-five-niné, sir," Pepper yelled the third time.

"Lay out, Lieutenant." Graham looked at him closely, studied him for five seconds as if trying to remember where he had seen him before. "But hold water. Don't charge line till I tell you. Lay down the alley. Be ready to wash the north side. But keep water out." He still looked like a rector as he added, "Gasoline's hell. We don't want to spread the damn stuff."

His calmness was contagious, to a new officer at least. O'Brien returned more slowly to his own impatient command. The suction was in place, connecting the intake of the pump with the hydrant. O'Brien gave his orders quietly.

"What started it?" the recruit, Clinch, panted as they laid out hose.

It was like a recruit to have curiosity; to waste breath when he'd soon be needing every gasp. Lieutenant O'Brien did not reply. Instead, he dragged hose; pulling out the kinks and bends.

"Touch-off," Bill Wolmar diagnosed behind him. That was all.

Fire, beating through the rear windows, leaped with hot feet upon the roof of a storage shed next door, as 159 turned into the alley. Chief Graham, still calm, trotted after them. He motioned to the newly kindled roof and Pepper shouted:

"Charge line! One-fifty-nine, water!"

The stream spurted out, a muddy torrent that quickly turned white. Pepper felt the wrench of pressure on the nozzle. Nolan, back at the engine, was watching his gages—three hundred, five hundred, seven hundred gallons a minute. Still the stream could not cool the passageway. They crouched there for fifty minutes, driving white water against the opposite wall, until finally, with the rubber of their slickers melting, cool air suddenly came to them.

The foam tanks had smothered the gasoline. The fire was beaten. Leaving his men to wet down the storage shed across the alley, Pepper sought the battalion chief. He found him in the smoky entry to the plant. There were five other men with him.

One was the second assistant marshal. Two were city detectives. Pepper did not know their names, he had never seen them before, but he recognized their type. A man born on Orange Street never mistakes a city detective. The third member of the group was the fire department attorney; a dark visaged little man, at the moment looking glum. The fourth, who was talking when Lieutenant O'Brien halted at the foot of the step, evidently was the manager of the plant.

"I'll not join their association," he was protesting. His voice lifted defiantly. "They warned me, said it was for protection. I wouldn't pay them, and—"

"Who warned you?" the fire department attorney demanded.

"A man named Purley. Been after me three times. This noon, a cat came down the alley; the employees were out to

lunch. An old looking car. There was a man beside the driver."

"How could you tell?"

"I saw it from the window. Office window."

"Was it Purley?"

"Oh, no; I'd swear to that. This one looked younger, a Greek or Italian or something. He got out. He threw something in the window. Open? Sure they were open. The next minute the car was going like hell, and there was fire everywhere."

"The regular racket," the fire attorney remarked. "They've been at it a couple of months. I've heard Purley's name mentioned before in this business. Usually it's just delivery trucks they get; this is the first time I've heard of them tackling a plant."

"Purley?" Chief Graham repeated. His voice was surprised. "You mean Little Ben?"

"None other. He's hard to beat. He boasts that he's got a pair of eyes and a pair of hands in every battalion in the fire business."

Lieutenant O'Brien suddenly felt cold, as cold as he had been hot a moment before. A pair of hands and a pair of eyes in every battalion!

"Well, God help 'em in my outfit." Graham turned and saw Pepper gaping at him. "All cleaned up back there?" he demanded. Then, "Get going. Pick up and go." He turned again to the group at the door.

O'Brien's head was swimming. Little Ben a racketeer! Little Ben of Orange Street; Little Ben, who just that day had reminded Lieutenant O'Brien that he was his friend; who had started him in the business and claimed now to have got him his promotion, and who asked a favor in return. Little Ben who had talked of loyalty. Loyalty—to a racketeer!

Pepper swallowed hard to get rid of the thing that was choking him.

"Pick up," he directed his crew. His voice was as husky as a recruit's after his first dose of smoke.

In silence he watched his men break the connections at the ends of fifty-foot lengths, roll the sections into tight buns; squeezing the water out of them as they rolled; and pitch the wet; dirty roller to the top of the hose box. He picked up the nozzle and siamese coupling, and set them firmly upon their pins on the running board, then counted the hose rolls. All there—five sections of three-inch line, five of two and a half inch.

He watched while Norton fastened the wings of the hood into place and pulled the hard suction around to the right side, snapping the straps upon it in its curved carrier. He spun the caps on the hose outlets, dropped the spanner and small wrenches into the tool box, and banged shut the lid.

"O. K?" he asked. O'Brien nodded.

He climbed into his seat. Once as they neared an intersection, Norton said hesitantly—

"Maybe, Lieutenant, you'd better sound the bell."

THE PUMPER swung up the concrete driveway in front of the engine house. Halligan dropped off the tailboard and, trotting mechanically, yanked the trips that swung open the wide front doors. Clinch followed, and Pepper, watching him, realized that the boy was groggy from smoke and heat. Wolmar, who stepped off before the big car halted, already was lighting his pipe.

The pumper backed cautiously into the wide doors, with Gillen on the left side guiding it, and Webster on the right.

"Fill the hose box," Pepper ordered. "Then stretch the wet line up to dry. You take the tower, Halligan. Clinch, stand watch at alarm stand."

Wolmar halted and stared at him, grumbling.

"Did you say anything?" Pepper wanted to know. Although he kept his voice cool, he felt a quick, unreasonable fury, an exasperation that included himself as well as Little Ben, all Orange Street, all the Badlands and all the fire department.

"No; I didn't say nothing," Wolmar answered. He stood with feet apart, his attitude insolent. "Only it's my turn to stand watch while the boys lift the line to the drying tower." He paused. "That's the habit in this house. Turn and turn about. This is my turn on watch."

"Clinch stands watch," Pepper repeated. He had not known that it was Wolmar's turn to stand watch. Hanging wet hose to dry is an unpleasant job, and that Wolmar wouldn't escape it filled him with a harsh satisfaction.

"Understand?" Wolmar demanded once more. "It's my turn on watch."

"Ree-cruit's tired," Pepper replied. "You lift hose."

The two faced each other, Pepper's cheeks bleached with anger, Wolmar's blue jaw thrust out belligerently. For the space of ten heartbeats neither spoke, then Wolmar turned to his task. But there was insolence in the way he turned his back. Pepper took off his helmet and hung it on the pumper, slid out of his slicker and spread it over a chair to dry.

He glanced at the clock, and with a short piece of chalk wrote on the blackboard the time of their return to quarters —1:55. Then he slowly climbed the stair and got out his dry clothing. Up from the round hole in the floor through which the brass sliding pole projected into the bunk room, he heard the voices of the men as they folded hose into the box of the pumper. Wolmar was complaining still. He had nothing to complain about yet, Pepper told himself. But before he was through he might have. Politics, racketeering, the fire business. A cloud of doubt crossed his mind. The dark cloud of Badland's loyalty.

For half a dozen years he had been away from Orange Street. He had never played politics. He had attended his hot, boisterous duties in the fire business, had plugged away, working for promotion. He had asked no favors, and so far as he knew, had received none. And now that he could wear the silver bugles of company office, now that he had a little power; Ben Purley appeared with talk of having had a hand in his promotion.

Not the Little Ben of the old days. Not the open handed politician who ruled the old ward ruthlessly for the good of the party and the prosperity of the faithful. Not the Little Ben who played a hard game as fairly as any game could be played in the Badlands. But Little Ben, racketeer . . .

Pepper had just pulled his dripping shirt over his head when he heard the staccato voice of the joker, sputtering a quick message. In his stocking feet, with his boots under his arm; he ran silently to the pole hole. The joker alarm was sounding for some company far in the South Side. The lieutenant had turned again toward his locker when he heard Wolmar's voice, growling at his work. One of the men had asked him a question, evidently, and he was answering it.

"Served 'em proper for not joining up. They got to join. Everybody's got to join when Ben tells 'em. Not only the dry cleaners, either. There's going to be other combines, others being organized right now. I got an offer of a job right now, helping organize. Think I'll take it. To hell with the fire department."

Pepper swallowed once, then clutching his boots tightly under his left elbow, he wrapped his forearms and legs about the brass sliding pole and shot downward. Anger, that had been bubbling in him ever since he heard Ben Purley's name there on the steps of the smoldering cleaning plant, burst violently now from his tongue. No one in his company would defend the touch-off racket. Not if all the politicians in the world approved. No one would say to hell with the fire department and get away with it.

The chill of the cold concrete struck up into his legs as his stocking feet slapped the apparatus floor. He approached Wolmar.

"A nice job helping organize?" he cried.

He heard the other men gasp. All halted at their work to stare at him. Wolmar, a hose coupling in his hands, turned around from the tailboard where

he was guiding the line into the box.

"Nice racketeering job?" Pepper found his voice shrill. "That what you mean? Then you'd best take it. Grab it! You need a job—you're not working here any more. I'll O. K. your resignation right away!"

"What you mean?" Wolmar snapped. "Don't pull that line on me. Damned if I'll stand it!"

"Won't stand it? Yes, you'll stand it. What you going to do about it? How you going to stop me? You heard me—listen again. I'll take your resignation now."

Wolmar turned to the men. His manner was insolent, his voice contemptuous.

"Listen to him. For half a cent—"

"Try it!" Pepper yelled. "Right now!"

"You're my witnesses." Wolmar spoke again to the men, this time sharply, as if he had gained a point. "He's threatening me, hear him? Jumps me for no reason. Threatens me. In the presence of the company. Remember it."

"And remember what he was saying when I slid the pole, men," Pepper commanded. "He said to hell with the fire department. Remember that."

"What you going to do about it?" Wolmar asked again. He was still at ease.

"Do?" Pepper retorted. "I'm going to file charges, that's what I'll do. First I'm going to suspend you. Turn in your badge—now. And your cap number. You're through till the board meets. I give you ten minutes to be out of the place."

He turned his back. The anger that had burned his tongue was cooler now. He walked stiffly toward the alarm stand in his stocking feet, still carrying his boots under his arm. He pressed the joker key.

"Give me the marshal," he directed. Then, "That you, Chief? Lieutenant O'Brien, Chief. I'm suspending Fireman First Class William Wolmar, Engine 159. At once. Yes, sir. My charges will follow. I'll mail them. And, sir, I wish you'd tell the fire attorney I'd like to see him."

He turned again and faced his men.

Wolmar laughed. He dropped the hose and crossed the floor confidently.

"Well, what are your charges?" he demanded. "I got a right to know. Says so in the rule book. What are they?"

He stood, feet apart, an insolent grin on his face.

"Sure, I'll tell you," Pepper agreed. "I'm charging you with insubordination and conduct unbecoming. That's enough."

Wolmar dropped his voice.

"I'll be back on the job next week," he said to the men. He then swaggered to the stair.

Pepper heard him whistling as he moved about the bunk room. Finally the door of his steel locker slammed; and he descended, wearing his street clothes. He bade the crew an affable goodby; promised to see them again in a day or two, and without granting Pepper even a glance as he passed the alarm stand, he tossed his badge and cap number upon it. He was whistling when he closed the door. Then, thinking better of it, he thrust his head back in.

"I'm goin' to see my mouthpiece," he promised. "Comes to filing charges, I'll file a few myself. They'll have glue on 'em, too. I'll go see my old friend the Big Shot. He'll have some good advice."

PEPPER sat down uncomfortably in his own office. He knew well enough that there would be developments. At twenty minutes past three, a sleek, well-manicured man of forty, with a distinctly Latin cast of countenance, called politely to see Lieutenant Pepper O'Brien. Pepper recognized him. He was one of Little Ben's lieutenants, one of the three Torto brothers. He never had met them, but he knew their reputation. The Tortos were valuable men. They'd do anything, and do it well, for a price.

"What is it?" Pepper asked.

Torto bowed politely.

"A private talk," he pleaded, motioning toward the men in the rear of the apparatus room. His speech was softened by an accent so gentle it was hard to imagine the things which a Torto might do, if money enough were offered him. "You have an office, perhaps?"

"I have," Pepper admitted. "But you're wasting your time, mister. I know what you want. I'll not withdraw my charges."

"Charges? It is not about charges I come to speak to you."

"Come upstairs," Pepper said.

In the office, with the door closed, Torto sat down comfortably in Pepper's own chair. Before he spoke he turned the chair so that his back was against a bare wall, and he faced both Pepper and the door.

"Nice office," he said.

"And now what do you want?" Pepper demanded. His face had hardened. He felt as if he lived in the Badlands again. The old lingo came back to his tongue.

"I wonder if you don't wish to get out of fire department," his caller suggested. "It is not a good job for you, on'erstand?"

"Little Ben send you?"

Torto looked blank.

"I think of your good," he said, as if he had not heard the question. "Maybe you want to quit this fire business. It is bad for the health, on'erstand?"

"Get out or I go for a ride?"

Torto shrugged.

"Do not put the words in my mouth. I come friendly, on'erstand. It is good thing for you to leave this business. Very soon. Tomorrow perhaps. You say yes, tomorrow?"

Pepper stood silent a moment, while the man lighted a cigaret. His confidence was immense. He was cool and undisturbed, sitting in Pepper's big chair, pushed back from Pepper's own desk. Finally Pepper spoke.

"You can tell Little Ben from me to go to hell."

"That is unwise. He is your good friend. Perhaps you get other good job. Perhaps I get good job for you."

"Tell Little Ben to come to me himself," Pepper said stiffly. "Tell him to come here like a man. I'll talk to him. I'll tell him to his face!"

"Very well." Torto arose slowly. "Perhaps he will come, perhaps not. Who knows. You resign tomorrow?"

"No," Pepper answered.

"That is too bad," the other muttered, and without further words opened the door, and Pepper heard the easy, confident patter of his well polished shoes as he hurried down the stair.

He heard, too, the whispered conversations of his men as they discussed the affair in the apparatus room. And finally a hesitant step upon the stair; the slow pace of a man approaching unwillingly. Then the rap upon it; a meek, gentle rap.

"Come," Pepper bade.

It was Nolan. He was obviously worried.

"The boys said I was to come to see you, Lieutenant. They said—well, it's like this. You was right about that guy Wolmar, dead right. He's a false alarm. And it was a dirty crack he made about a touch-off being O.K. because this dry cleaning bird didn't join their racket. But we kinda think maybe you don't know all the sides to it. This feller that was in here just now—this Torto—did he slip you some advice? Never mind telling. But I guess it's a good thing to take it. If he wants Wolmar back, why don't you pull in your charges?"

"Why should I?" Pepper demanded. "You admit he's a false alarm."

"Sure, sir, you're right. He is. But this Torto—he's kind of high voltage, you know. Like to throw a bomb in the front doors some night. It'd raise hell with the pumper . . ."

"He won't," Pepper promised. His teeth snapped. "He won't take a chance on that. It isn't the pumper he'll be after. It's me. And I'm not very particular. I used to live in the same place he does. I'll take a whirl at him. Thanks

just the same for the advice. Now if you'll go down and thank the boys; I'll finish the charges."

Five minutes later the telephone on the desk rang.

"Pepper?" the familiar voice of Little Ben Purley said. "Say, Pepper, I want to talk with you. Can you get off a little while?"

"No, sir," Pepper answered, "I can't." At the sound of Little Ben's voice some of the resistance seemed to slip out of his spirit. It was so casual, so self-possessed. "But I'll see you here, any time."

"I may be over," Little Ben said, "if I have time. It ain't so important to me."

WHEN he had hung up Pepper called the fire attorney's office. A secretary reported without emotion that the attorney was out, but would be in the next morning. Pepper insisted that he must speak to the lawyer at once; it was a life and death matter. The secretary, accustomed to life and death matters, was sorry in an impersonal way, but did not know where to find his employer. He had been trying all afternoon. The attorney was on some kind of an investigation.

Little Ben arrived within fifteen minutes. Pepper, from his office window, saw him climb out of his custom built car, after the Tamer had stepped down first. Within the apparatus room, he shook hands affably with the crew. In the office his manner did not change.

"It's about Bill," he told Pepper. "Bill made a fool of himself, and so did you. I've told him so. You boys have got to be friends."

"I'll not talk about it, Ben."

"Oh?" Purley looked at him shrewdly. "Yes, I guess you will. Remember how you got your job, Pepper? I got it for you. Why, it was me put pants on you when you was freezing, when you was a kid. Remember that? It was me that watched you when you went through school, kept you out of trouble. And your promotion—"

"I got that on my examination," Pepper said. "I stood at the head of the list. You had nothing to do with it. I earned it myself."

Little Ben chuckled.

"In a pig's eye, you did. You got promoted on my say-so. If I can't grift a bit of promotion for a friend, well, my name ain't Ben Purley. But after I got it for you, then what? I ask you the loan of a favor. Just this morning I ask it. And what do you do? You spit in my ear for the trouble, before I'm out of the way."

He looked keenly at the new lieutenant.

"Got anything to say, Pepper? Anything about loyalty, f'r instance?"

"I sure have." Pepper felt the muscles of his throat contract. "I'm going to say it, and say it plain, too. I'll stick by a friend. You taught me that, down in Orange Street. By any friend that plays the game and don't doublecross me. And by my job. Maybe you did get me this job, but *I* kept it. See? *I* kept it. You got Bill Wolmar his job, too. And he isn't going to keep his."

"We'll see," Ben interrupted.

"For when you go pulling a racket, a fire racket—"

"Me? See here, Boy. You don't know what you're saying!"

"I do know. I know that you went to that dry cleaning shop and asked him to join your outfit, your gang. He didn't do it. So you turn a mob loose. And I damn near get burnt up with my whole company today because he won't pay you—"

"Wait—wait, there! You say that's my racket?"

"You hear what I say. And Bill Wolmar, the Tamer's brother, says the same thing. You offered him a job in it. And it isn't only dry cleaners. You're branching out to the building trades."

"That's the bunk," Little Ben said. He laughed quietly. "What's that thing it's called? Coincidence. Ain't that the word? I see it in the newspapers. Very convenient word, Pepper. Long, but

fits the bill. Coincidence. Of course, if this dry cleaning softie had took our protection, we'd have throwed the fear of God in the boy that tossed the pineapple. Nobody would of dared blow him up and nobody would of got hurt. But no, he was wiser than me, this dry cleaner. He's going to go it alone, this dry cleaner. But when you go saying I threw that persuader, why, you talk like a flattie, Pepper. And listen. If anybody comes asking you any questions about it—" he leaned forward slightly and spoke in a clear, emphatic voice—"you keep your nose dry, see? Don't start any real flattie on anything you can't prove. And you nor anybody else can't prove nothing. It ain't what you think that keeps the Big House full, it's what you can prove to the grand jury."

Pepper regarded him silently.

"I just called to say," Little Ben finished, "that I guess you ought to put Bill back on the job. You was a bit hot headed, that's all. Put him back, and I'll keep an eye on you, see that you work right along in the business. Little Ben never forgets a friend. Ain't that the truth, Pepper?"

"Guess it is," Pepper answered.

"Or an enemy," Purley added quietly, without looking at Pepper. "I guess that's all. What you say?"

Pepper thought quickly. Through his mind flashed impressions, vague, flickering, like a badly timed film. Orange Street. Badlands loyalties. Hunger and cold, and Little Ben's Christmas gestures—bread, sugar and coal and pants. That first day at drill school. The Tamer. Torto. Bill Wolmar, boasting. The little manager of the dry cleaning shop, wringing his hands on the step. Blazing gasoline, threatening a good engine crew. The fire racket . . .

"You can go to hell, Ben," he said.

The decision leaped out of something inside of him. Reason had nothing to do with it.

He heard Purley chuckling as he descended the stair.

Pepper tried again, without success, to get the fire attorney on the telephone.

The next day, when he did see the attorney, that official shook his head.

"We can't lay a finger on anything," he confessed when Pepper had finished the story. "Circumstantial evidence—Lord, yes, enough to fill a courtroom. But nothing definite. We can't make it stick. Arson is the hardest thing in the world to prove, and this racketeering is just fancy arson. And in this case, it's harder. Why? Because Purley doesn't touch them off himself. We'd have to get him on conspiracy to commit. And that's a stone wall." He spread out his hands hopelessly.

Lieutenant O'Brien thought a long time after the attorney was gone. He was disappointed. But if Little Ben Purley's crime was a stone wall that would withstand all their buffetings, as the fire attorney said, Bill Wolmar's misdemeanor was less subtle, and much easier to prove. Little Ben might bluff a lawyer, might bluff police and fire departments just as he had bluffed the Badlands for so many years. He was smart. Bill Wolmar wasn't smart.

The next day Pepper sent his charges against Fireman First Class William Wolmar to the marshal, who referred them to the trial board. Nothing happened for a week. Engine 159 rolled out to its duty, fought fire, stood its watches and awaited developments. Pepper heard his crew conversing in whispers frequently. The men were afraid of reprisals. They admitted that Pepper had been right, but insisted that he had been reckless as well.

The newspapers hinted at length that the dry cleaning plant fire probably was incendiary.

Incendiary! Pepper threw down the paper and stared at the wall. Was all the world afraid of Little Ben? The fire attorney, the dry cleaners, the police, the editors—did every one speak softly in his presence? Pepper tried to remember the men who had disagreed with Purley, and discovered that it was a disheartening list.

Most of them were dead. Some had disappeared. Some had been taken for a ride. One or two were in prison. Three, found dead with discharged guns beside them, had been listed by unimaginative police as suicides. Little Ben objected to disagreement. Pepper thought it over. Little Ben had told him not to file the charges against Wolmar. In a cool, impudent way, he had allowed Pepper to understand his threat without uttering it directly.

On the morning that Wolmar's charges were to be heard, Pepper appeared early at the city hall. He had not slept the night before. He walked the corridors nervously, watching the clock. The case was called for nine. He saw the assistant marshals who made up the board hurrying in, one at a time. The big chief himself strode busily toward his office. From Engine 159, Norton and Clinch and Webster came in together, unwillingly. Pepper had asked them to be his witnesses.

But of Wolmar, or Torto, or the Tamer, or of Little Ben Purley, there was no sign. Purley would stand by a friend . . . Then why wasn't he here?

WHEN the clock pointed to nine, Pepper stepped into the waiting room, outside the board meeting room. Through the thick door, he could hear the voices of the assistant marshals who tried cases within the department. Once or twice when clerks hurried in and out he heard snatches of talk, heavy laughter, smelled tobacco smoke, caught glimpses of big, well fed figures in trim blue uniforms around a long table. There were no other cases to come before the board this morning. Pepper and his three men sat alone in the waiting room.

Finally the door opened.

"Lieutenant O'Brien?" A clerk, with his thumb in a notebook, looked over his glasses into the room.

Pepper stepped in, saluted and waited. The first deputy marshal sat at the head of the table. There was a stack of papers before him.

"You filed these charges against Fireman First Class Wolmar?"

"Yes, sir."

"We just got a telephone call from Wolmar's attorney. He's not going to fight the case. Won't appear. So we'll just let it go by default. He probably knows he hasn't a leg to stand on and doesn't want to go to the cost of putting up a fight. You fix his papers. Give him a discharge for the good of the service, and under the recommendations write briefly, very briefly, your reasons, which you set forth here. Do you understand? We'll O. K. the discharge when it gets to us."

"Yes, sir." Pepper saluted again and backed to the door.

In the corridor he passed a trim figure, hurrying in the opposite direction. He did not realize until it was too late that he recognized the man. They had not looked directly at one another, but he knew, after he had passed, that it had been Martin Torto. Ben had sent Torto to see whether or not Pepper O'Brien appeared.

That night, again, Pepper found little sleep. His crew greeted him quietly the next morning. There was a restraint upon them, an uneasiness, as if they feared impending tragedy. They said nothing about Bill Wolmar. Pepper, thinking it over, agreed with the first deputy marshal that Wolmar had not wanted a fight. Probably Little Ben had seen that a fight in this case would fail, and Ben liked to keep his record clear of defeat.

But the case was not closed. Pepper knew Orange Street and the inflexible code of the Badlands well enough to realize that. Gangland, that holds official justice in contempt, that scorns the courts and despises the police, has a code of justice all its own. Pepper had seen it work many times, even before he was eighteen. It is sure, quick, merciless. In gangland a man marked for punishment makes his will and with what bravado he has left, he awaits the inevitable.

Pepper had crossed Little Ben. What form revenge would take he could not guess. But he felt sure that it would be swift.

The fact that nothing happened began to unnerve him at length. He expected at least another warning. None came. He saw nothing of Little Ben, nothing more of Torto, of the Tamer, of his brother Bill. For all he knew they had dropped off the earth.

Engine 159 rushed out to alarms, battled fire, stood its watches. The men said little now. But Pepper observed that they looked up quickly and expectantly whenever the front door opened.

A week passed. It was Pepper's regular day off duty and he had dropped in at his company quarters, as many an officer does, to see the record of alarms on the board. Returning home, he recognized Little Ben turning a corner just ahead of him. Purley was carrying a badly rolled umbrella, and shuffled along, whistling quietly, apparently at peace. Pepper stiffened. He wondered with sudden confusion if Little Ben had timed the meeting.

"Hello," Purley said. He smiled and extended his hand. "How's things?"

"Well enough," Pepper answered. He wondered where the Tamer was. Ben never ventured far without him.

"You ought to come down home some night," Little Ben invited. "We got a new club over on Taylor Street. Nice place."

"Thanks," Pepper said. He made no promise. Still affable, Purley strolled on.

Then, for the first time, Pepper saw the Tamer lounging against a building on the opposite corner. When Little Ben shuffled on, the Tamer followed.

The next morning Pepper took up the newspapers before he glanced at the record of the night's alarms.

"They must of had a snorter," old Halligan remarked, and pointed to the figures scrawled on the blackboard.

The board was crowded with numbers, dots and dashes, the cryptic code of the joker and box alarm instruments, recorded with chalk.

"Down in South Side," Halligan said. He examined the symbols. "No. 145 got the still. They pulled the box. And the two-bagger come right in on top of it."

The two men stared at the blackboard. To their understanding eyes it told a long story of battle, danger, immense labor, fatigue.

"Four special calls," Pepper remarked. "They've not tapped it out yet." He opened his newspaper. "Unfinished apartment," he said. He read silently a moment. "A touch-off. Started four or five places at once. Hello—" he caught himself in the exclamation and made no further remarks.

The story made him cold between the shoulders. It had been a racketeer fire. The owners of the building told police that they had been approached three times. "For protection," the story said. The police announced that it resembled several recent blazes in dry cleaning plants. Pepper sat back limply, thinking of Little Ben.

Nothing had happened in engine 159's own neighborhood. His district had been spared, in spite of the great new apartments going up along the boulevard. But he might expect a job any time. Little Ben hadn't walked around that block to meet him for nothing. The meeting had been a warning, a threat, a gesture.

TWO more weeks rolled by. The day was a Saturday. At noon the company had rolled to a small roof fire, had squirted hand pumps and torn off shingles, but not charged a line. Again at four o'clock it howled through the streets in response to a false alarm. There were no other calls that day.

Summer had come at last, after a laggard spring. The night was hot. Up in the bunk room the air hung breathless and only small lost breezes found their way into the big apparatus room doors. The uninterrupted drone of the city

sounded across roofs. At nine o'clock Pepper got up from his chair before the alarm stand and called Halligan to watch. The senior pipeman always took first night shift at the instruments.

He was the only man awake now. Except for young Clinch, who slept in a chair, with a book open on his lap, the others had gone upstairs.

Pepper started on his evening round of inspection. He was in his night boots already, and he walked silently to the open front doors and glanced out at the driveway to make sure that no one had parked a car in front of the quarters. Over the low skyline across the street he could make out the skeletons of steel towers, rising on the new boulevard two blocks away.

He returned, passing through the apparatus room, and flashed on the lights in the kitchen. The cook had done his job well, everything was tidy. He examined the dish cloth, to see that it had been rinsed properly, and fitted the lid tightly on the bread can. Leaving the kitchen, he stepped into the rear of the quarters to try the back door, which gave on the alley. The door was kept locked at night, as a precaution against sneak thieves. To reach it from the front of the house one must pass through a narrow corridor, back of the space once allotted to the horses' stalls. A quiet thief could plunder their storerooms back here, and no member of the company be the wiser.

Pepper halted suddenly. The rear door stood open. He had locked it himself, he remembered distinctly, at eight o'clock. He wondered which of his crew had been careless. Still wondering, he stepped forward through the dark. His hand touched the latch before he was aware of the shadow, close against the wall.

It was a man waiting there. Pepper thought for some reason, not of Little Ben, not of the Tamer, not of Torto of the polished shoes and bad reputation, but of Bill Wolmar. Bill knew all about this door, all about evening inspection. The figure stirred. It spoke quietly.

"That you, Pepper?" And before he could answer, "I got a favor to ask."

It was Wolmar—disgraced, beaten, whining for a favor at the back door. Pepper hesitated, and in the moment of hesitation he lost his chance to slam the door, to yell, to escape.

The arm stretched toward him suddenly. A new note, quietly, but full of command, colored Wolmar's voice.

"Step out here," he ordered. "Not a sound."

Pepper saw the dark, blunt shape of the gun in the other's hand. The ex-pipeman advanced three paces.

"Come along," he bade again. "Quick." Pepper obeyed.

"We're going to have a talk, me and you," Bill Wolmar said. He spoke confidently. "Put your right hand down—slow. That's it. Shut the door gentle—gentle I say! Don't need to wake the boys." He chuckled. "Funny, us meeting this way. Like old friends, eh, Pepper?"

"What do you want?" Pepper demanded.

"Nothing particular. Only to remind you about what good friends we are. You can walk over that way. Towards that shed."

They had crossed the alley and stood in the deep shadows there. Pepper stared quickly through the darkness, searching for other figures. He could see none. Wolmar was chuckling again. He kept out of reach and held the gun ready.

"The joke's on you," he explained. "You'd file charges, would you? Well, there's all kinds of charges. Now, for instance—"

He halted. Pepper, listening, felt a new and sharper terror. The box alarm instrument was sounding back in his apparatus room. He heard the shrill voice of the bell lifted commandingly. The closed door and the distance muffled its beat, so that he could not count the strokes. Instinctively he started forward.

"Hold on!" Wolmar cried. "You ain't going anywheres."

Pepper saw the gun waving toward him. At the same time he heard shouts within the quarters. Nolan was calling his name.

Some one up in the bunk room was yelling.

"It's a go!" Pepper said hoarsely. "A go—"

"Not for you," Wolmar answered. "You ain't going anywheres. They'll get along without you."

"I've got to go!"

"You ain't," Wolmar contradicted. "You can't. And you won't say a word for yourself tomorrow. Even if you did, who'd believe you? Particular when I got an alibi, all hatched and waiting. It was your old friend Bill stuck you up? How could he? I'm covered. Watertight alibi. I ain't so dumb."

Pepper started again. He heard the roar of the motor. Halligan was taking out the company. Halligan would report to the battalion chief.

"You been so damn particular," the ex-pipeman was saying. "Everything got to be neat and tidy, everybody got to toe the mark. Well, somebody else goes up before the board this time."

THE SIREN screamed in the street. Engine 159, without its lieutenant, plunged to duty. Pepper, sweating, heard it straighten out for a run north, heard the cry of the siren die slowly as distance grew. He heard Bill Wolmar chuckling again. Then other sirens yelled across roofs.

"This ain't Little Ben's doings at all," Wolmar explained. He still pointed the gun. "It's my party, personal, just me. Me and you. Hell, I don't aim to bump you off. That's too good for you. I'm going to leave you to explain. They'll come askin' you to explain, all right. There'll be inspectors thicker'n voters on Madison Street. You think so blessed much of the fire business—well, you'll think of it from outside after this, same way I do."

A ladder truck rumbled past on the next street. Pepper recognized its hollow vibration, the slow start it made after rounding a turn.

"I'll turn you loose after while," Bill said. "After all the firemen hear about you. You was out in the alley chinning with a dame, maybe. So busy you couldn't roll with the boys. The chief will have lots of questions. He'll want to know was she a blonde—"

Pepper did not reply.

"Funny," Wolmar went on, "how I'd guess a box would come in just this minute."

"Nothing funny about that," Pepper cried. His throat was dry. "It's probably just another touch-off."

"Who knows? Might be."

Pepper snapped his teeth together. His hands still were lifted. Wolmar's feet were spread confidently in front of him. Then, without warning, the rear door of the engine house swung open.

Pepper saw the shadow of a man hurrying into the alley. For a moment he guessed it was Torto, come to finish the job.

Then the beam of a flashlight bored through the dark.

"Hi!" It was Clinch, the recruit. "Hi—Lieut!"

Wolmar's eyes left his captive for a moment. In that second Pepper dodged. He dropped low, yelled, and dived for Wolmar. The ex-fireman called out hoarsely. Clinch halted, confused.

Wolmar fired once, wildly, and plunged away down the alley.

"After him!" Pepper shouted.

Wolmar turned again and fired back. Pepper stopped, calling to the recruit to halt.

Clinch was panting.

"Halligan had—me—stay. Said you'd had—trouble."

"Where'd they roll?"

"North and Eureka. Box alarm."

"We'd best be going."

"But, him—" Clinch motioned down the alley.

"Plenty of time. Know him?"

"Just saw his shadow."

"Hurry," Pepper said.

They ran in through the house, halting only long enough to make sure that the rear door was bolted.

As they emerged from the wide doors, leaving the bare apparatus floor behind, Pepper's plan was to commandeer the first passing car. But a sight met him, across roofs, that caused him to halt. On one of the new apartment buildings, bulking high into the air in the next street to the east, he made out a tiny flash of light, far up in the walls. It flickered red for a moment, then yellow; went out, flickered up again.

"Wait," he ordered.

Back at the alarm stand, he snapped out a message to headquarters, took up the receiver, waited impatiently for ten seconds for the voice of the alarm operator.

"O'Brien speaking, Engine 159. Fire on the Avenue. Eleven hundred block north. New apartment. Way up in the air. Need trucks. Send trucks on special call along with box companies."

He slapped the receiver back to its hook. With Clinch at his heels he cut across the street. The blaze on the new tower was burning faintly. Now there were two flames at opposite ends of the same floor. Pepper forgot the affair in the alley the moment before. The fight with Bill Wolmar was a personal matter he could settle any time. This was fire, in a new apartment, where the lathers had been working just today.

He had been watching that building, these past three days in particular. It was just ready for plaster. And any racketeer picks the moment to start fire when the wooden lath is in place before the plaster goes on, while the structure is full of drafts and the strips are piled up like kindling.

On the cross street Pepper yelled at a policeman. The man stared a moment before he understood. Then he blew his whistle sharply, three commanding blasts, and followed Pepper and the recruit.

There was no sign of fire from the ground at the front of the building. A high board fence surrounded it, with a watchman leaning back comfortably in his chair, half asleep, at the gate.

"It's a touch-off!" Pepper shouted. "Touch-off! Fellow must still be in there. Get behind; we'll head him off—"

Other policemen, summoned by the whistle, were closing in. Fire sirens were screaming down the Avenue. The watchman was asking questions. Leaving Clinch at the gate, Pepper and one policeman ran down the alley. Another patrolman stationed himself at the outer corner. Two more rushed in through the gate.

There was a ladder against the fence at the darkest spot, where the two alleys joined and, seeing it, Pepper dropped back, pulling the blue sleeve of the officer who was with him. Fire was showing boldly now, in long ribbons that blew in the sulky night breeze.

"Ladder," Pepper whispered. "Here's where he went in."

"We'll get him when he comes down," the policeman answered.

They heard a board tumble somewhere inside.

"Don't take him here," Pepper urged. "Follow him up. He's most likely got a car parked somewhere."

THEY flattened themselves against the opposite wall, in a doorway that cast too thin a shadow properly to conceal them. Running feet within the fence halted opposite the ladder. They saw a head pop over the wall. And a figure swung across rapidly, searching for the rungs. The man paused, peering up and down the dark alley, then descended quickly and started in the direction opposite to the front of the building.

Pepper and the policeman fell in behind quietly. A car stood by the curb at the mouth of the alley. Pepper recognized it. It was a custom built model. The engine was idling. A big man stood beside it. Another, considerably smaller, sat in the front seat. The running figure from the alley plunged toward the rear door.

"Halt!" The policeman charged out of the alley. "Halt, I say!"

The big man at the car door straight-

ened up. He lifted one foot to the running board, thought better of it, turned again to face the officer. Flame atop the building cast wavering reflections on the scene.

"Stick 'em up, brother," the policeman commanded. "Up!"

Pepper recognized the Tamer. His hand dropped to his right coat pocket and he fired just as another officer galloped out of the alley.

Pepper felt a sharp blow on his shoulder —as if some one had struck him with a scantling—and then a numbness. He heard the roar of the motor, heard other shots, cries, commands. Patrolmen were swarming about under the glare of the mounting fire. A hose company ran past.

Then suddenly there was silence. The police closed in, and all flame seemed to be blotted out. The lights dimmed quickly. Some one was trying to lift Pepper. He heard an ambulance bell. And the loud, excited voice of Clinch, the recruit:

"The cops got Torto. It was him, running; and Bill Wolmar's brother, Tamer, had the gun."

"Get Bill Wolmar," Pepper ordered. A policeman bent close and Pepper repeated the name.

Some one put him into an ambulance then. The intern cut his shirt away from his shoulder.

"Went in the collar bone," he said. "Deflected upward. Not bad—not bad at all."

Pepper could remember nothing else distinctly that night.

In the morning, at the fire attorney's office, he walked in alone, with his arm in a sling.

The chief of department, the fire attorney—all officialdom seemed to be there. Pepper watched confusedly the preparations for the investigation. Police brought Bill Wolmar in at length. He looked at Pepper defiantly.

"We got him," a detective sergeant said in Pepper's ear. "He was out to a club on Taylor Street, sitting pretty. We yanked him down and put him in cold storage all night. He don't know about the others. Says he's got an alibi when we asked him where he was."

"Where were you, Wolmar?" a detective asked. "Where were you right around nine o'clock?"

Wolmar laughed.

"Me?" he answered easily. "In the club. Oh, I got a good alibi. Little Ben Purley, and my brother the Tamer, and Martin Torto—we was all together in the club."

No one spoke for a minute.

"Then you were in bad company, young fellow," the detective told him. "For we got all three, red handed, at a touch-off, just before we picked you up. Yes, sir. Torto coming over the fence, Little Ben and your brother waiting in the car. Better fix up another alibi."

"He was down the alley back of the quarters covering me with a gun," Pepper corrected. "He told me about his alibi, too. He knew there was going to be a fire. When the alarm came in from North Avenue, he thought it was his own blaze."

There was a stir near the door. Little Ben entered. For bodyguard this morning he had two detective sergeants. He peered about as he came into the room until his eyes found Pepper. He nodded pleasantly then. Pepper frowned back. Only the fire department attorney greeted the lieutenant of Orange Street enthusiastically.

"I'm glad to see you, Ben Purley," he cried. "Glad to see you just like this, where you can't get away. And we got the young lieutenant to thank."

The chief of department crossed to Pepper.

"Want to give you my thanks, too, O'Brien," he said. "I've heard all about it. Purley's been yapping, of course. Says you weren't loyal to him. I've made it plain. Been telling him just now how loyal you are."

"To him, you mean?" Pepper asked.

"To the job," the chief corrected.

In the Bunkhouse

By W. C. TUTTLE

"THAT bronc shore went high an' handsome, sunfishin', swappin' ends, squealin'; an' there was Lonnie, blood runnin' from his nose an' ears, but ridin' straight up. Man, what a ride he made!"

"Lonnie's good rider, but he's got too much brains to ever be a big rider."

"Ridin' takes brains. I never did see a real good rider that didn't have brains. You got to be smart to ever be a good rider."

"Shucks! You don't need brains to ride buckers. Lemme tell you about a ride, which *was* ridin'. It happened down in this here country, 'fore you was born. I was a-workin' for the XYZ trail herd outfit, an' my bunkie was Cinnabar Slim, the greatest bronc rider that ever throwed a leg over a saddle.

"We was a-headin' for this town of Applauchie, with this here herd, an' along the way we hears a heap about a certain outlaw bronc, which belongs to another trail herd, the Circle 7. This here devil horse ain't never been rode, an' the Circle 7 opines that there ain't a livin' man what can stay on him. Our herd boss is Old Man Shires, an' he comes to me an' Slim for a pow-wow. We've got the bettinest bunch of waddies you ever seen, an' they yearns to separate the Circle 7 from all their money.

"Well, we all gits to Applauchie about the same time, an' there we finds that Cinnabar Slim's reputation is plenty knowed. When a outfit owns a unridable bronc an' the other outfit a puncher that ain't never been throwed, you've got a bettin' layout; an' when the smoke of argument blows away, the XYZ outfit is mortgaged to the extent that if the gray outlaw throws Cinnabar, every man in our bunch will have to ride a broomstick an' wear nothin' but socks.

"The ride was pulled off on a flat beside our camp. It took seven men to saddle that bronc.

"'Boys, I'll ride him till I die—an' mebbe longer. Let's go!' Slim yells.

"Well, sir, you never seen nothin' like it. Nothin' ever bucked like that bronc. It was jist a blur. Nobody could see jist what was goin' on 'cause that bronc was spinnin' like a top, goin' upside down, turnin' handsprings, flip-flops—everything. I tell you it wasn't anythin' like you ever heard about.

"They was a-headin' toward the chuck wagon. There wasn't no rules. Slim had to ride till he got throwed or the bronc quit. If they crashed into that chuck wagon an' went down, spillin' Slim, we lose. I grabs me a hunk of tarpaulin an' runs between this here blur an' the wagon, tryin' to turn the bronc. Did he turn? He did not.

"Into the air he went, jist like a gray bird; the greatest jump a horse ever made—right over the top of the covered chuck wagon, with Slim a-leanin' down, slashin' with a quirt. But at the top of that jump the gray bronc doubled up, slashed up and down with one hind foot, an' he cut Cinnabar Slim's head off as slick as you please. The head hit the dirt ahead of the bronc, an' we kissed our bets goodby, but that head hit right side up, an' Cinnabar lets out his last yell—

"'Body stick with that bronc; it don't take brains to ride!'

"An' I give you my word, when that bronc was exhausted, we had to pry Slim's body off that saddle. Yessir, it took seven men to git him loose.

"Brains, hell! Whose deal is it?"

The Sword of Saint Louis

By HAROLD LAMB

ONE MAN came to the rescue of the Holy Land during these dark years. He was Louis, King of France—that stubborn and debonair prince better known to history as Saint Louis.

The first day of June, 1249, when the Crusaders in the Holy Land were clinging to the coast—Jerusalem lost to them and their backs to the sea—when Christendom was wearied by the long wars of the Popes and the emperors, and pilgrims marched in procession carrying black crosses, a great ship bearing the crimson oriflamme ploughed through a tranquil sea, heading south from Cyprus toward the flat shore of Egypt.

The ship, a galleass, bore within it a large and varied company. Louis and his queen, Marguerite of Provence, occupied the cabin of the after-castle. Louis, who towered a head above his courtiers, had to stoop and bend his knees to enter it. Below this state cabin were cubicles filled with the chests of the king's treasure and gear—

A Novelette of the Iron Men and Saints

with guardsmen and Marguerite's ladies.

By the mainmast on deck an altar had been erected, and the seamen had seen to it that a carved figure of Saint Nicholas, patron of wayfarers, hung upon the mast. Around the butt of the foremast clustered the passengers who had marketing to do. Here the inevitable Armenians had stacked their baskets.

Beneath their feet on the main deck were the stables of the war horses, and the cattle that provided both milk and meat for the voyagers. Below the live-stock in semi-darkness the naked bodies of slaves moved back and forth monotonously upon the long benches, swinging the heavy oars of the galleass, their hides smarting with salt cuts and maggots. In the stench of sweat and bilge they breathed and labored, their feet braced against timbers above the sand that served as ballast and—being cooled by the bilge water—cellar for the wine kegs of the great ship.

The weather held fair, and this was well. A storm, or even a heavy swell meant suffering for the men and beasts alike. The square sails painted with a crimson cross flapped against the mast, or snapped out in a puff of wind; gulls screamed round the mastheads, and flying fish glittered fleetingly above the surface of the sea.

The galleass forged ahead with its king and its shrine and its throngs of expectant souls peering into the haze of the horizon for a sight of Egypt's shore. On either hand, as far as the eye could see, other sails bore it company.

"A pleasant sight," observed the young Lord of Joinville, for it seemed as if the whole sea were covered with cloth, from the great quantity of sails.

John, Lord of Joinville and high senes-

chal of Champagne, had an eager interest in everything that went on in the fleet. He shared one of the great ships with another knight. Joinville himself was young and light of purse, and had not been able to pay the travel expenses of his nine knights until Louis took him into the royal pay and favor.

Like the other nobles—and all the chivalry of France was here upon the fleet with the king—Joinville had entered the Crusade at the express wish of his sovereign. Like Louis, he had donned a pilgrim's mantle, had paid all his debts at home and borrowed what he could for the venture. The young knight had in him a boyish humor and a blunt honesty of tongue that pleased Louis.

"I must say," Joinville remarked once, "that he is a great fool who shall put himself in danger of the sea having any mortal sin on his conscience—for when he goes to sleep in the evening he knows not if in the morning he may find himself under the sea."

"Better would it be," the king observed, "to become a leper than to have the guilt of a mortal sin."

"Thirty deadly sins would I rather commit," the knight said frankly, "than be a leper."

Louis shook his head in disapproval. The levity of his nobles always troubled him. He had the face of a blond angel and the large untroubled eyes of a child. He liked to clothe his tall, stooped figure in somber camelet and woolen surcoat—a friar's habit would have liked him better. Since the age of twelve—he was now thirty-four—he had been king of France, and his marriage to Marguerite had been a wedding of boyhood and girlhood.

Not until they fared forth on this ship did Marguerite feel that she had her husband to herself—although she had dreaded the Crusade. Louis had called for the cross once when the strange illness, the fits of weakness that came and went, was upon him. He had taken oath to do battle for Jerusalem, and all the pleading of the women could not turn him from his purpose. To his devout and straightforward mind, the duty to journey to the east and redeem Jerusalem was clear.*

He had tried vainly to make peace between Pope and emperor at the council of Lyons, and he had embarked finally in spite of the opposition of both of them. While the Pope restrained Crusaders in Italy from joining Louis, the emperor wrote to the Egyptian sultan of his coming, and urged the podesta of Genoa to delay outfitting the fleet, while he prophesied the failure of the Crusade.

But Louis of France had all the persistence of a friar and all the ardor of the chivalry that was bred in the bones and blood of him. And the proof of it was this fleet of eighteen hundred sails moving over the quiet sea. He had the utter faith of a Godfrey of Bouillon—the faith that sometimes works miracles.

And for once a great Crusade was under a single command; because even the legate of the Papal court could not swerve Louis from his course.

WHEN the king's ship anchored off the beach of Damietta, the seaport of Cairo, it seemed to the experienced Templars and Syrian barons that a kindly Providence watched over the tall person of the first seigneur of France. Louis scanned the shore—his first sight of the lands of Islam—and asked who were the horsemen drawn up beyond the beach.

"Sire," he was told, "they are Moslems."

Hearing this, Louis would have none of the advice of his counselors who urged him to wait until the rest of the ships came up. He ordered the oriflamme carried ashore, and the knights climbed down into the smaller galleys, running them up on the beach and leaping out waist deep in the water. The tall king stood with them when they beat off the charges of the Moslem cavalry, forming

* He sailed to Egypt because his military advisers assured him that it was necessary to capture Cairo in order to move on Jerusalem.

in ranks with the points of their shields in the sand and their lances braced against the ground. Joinville heard the barons restrain Louis from riding a course against the infidels alone.

The horses were landed, the chivalry mounted, the scarlet banner—the oriflamme—lifted, and Louis advanced—to find the shore deserted and the gates of Damietta standing open. Even the French knights, who were wont to go forward first and investigate afterward, scented a trap in this. Scouts rode into the gates and returned presently to report the houses of Damietta empty, the streets littered and only fugitives to be seen, while the storehouses of the bazars were burning. The Moslem army and the garrison of Damietta had disappeared.* The bridges of boats leading inland over the canals were intact.

Louis commanded the prelates to sing a *Te Deum*, and carried the oriflamme into the city that had withstood a previous Crusade for a year. It seemed to him that this was no less than a manifestation of divine favor, but he was troubled when the nobles plunged into looting and seized palaces for their quarters.

"You could not throw a stone," he assured Joinville, "from my house without striking a brothel kept by my attendants."

With Damietta thus miraculously placed in his hands, Louis curbed the revelry of his vassals and waited until the season of floods had passed. Then he called a council to discuss what should next be done. Louis placed his trust altogether in Providence; but he had passed many years in the camp of war, and he relied upon the advice of his captains.

They were all at the council—his three mighty brothers, Alphonse of Poitiers and the reckless Robert, Count of Artois, and the silent Charles of Anjou, who had a giant's strength in his limbs. Daring soldiers sat beside them—De Beaujeu, Constable of France; De Sonnac, Master of the Temple; and William Longsword, Earl of Salisbury, leader of the English swords. They were men of proved courage, victors in tournament and battlefield, the very paladins of French chivalry.

The Count of Artois would hear of nothing but an advance on Cairo, where the Moslem army waited.

"If you would slay the snake," he cried, "strike first at the head."

Others argued for possession of the coast and the capture of Alexandria. De Sonnac and the Longsword, who were experienced in the warfare of the East, held their peace. The opportunity was fair indeed—they had twenty thousand horses and forty thousand foot, fit and well armed. And the French fought best in attack. Moreover, rumors had reached them of the death of the sultan in Cairo and the disorder of the Moslem army.

In fact it seemed to them as if fate had placed them in the exact position of the first Egyptian Crusade, when a king of Jerusalem and a legate of the Pope had moved upon the city thirty years before. But this time they had been careful to wait until Father Nile had subsided.

Louis meditated and agreed with the opinion of his brother, Robert, Count of Artois.

So, leaving a strong garrison in Damietta, and placing Queen Marguerite and the French noblewomen upon the ships in the river, so that they should be secure from harm, the army of France followed the oriflamme up the Nile. They took the road of the other Crusade, and the Moslems again awaited the invaders at the fortified camp of Mansura above the branch of the Nile.

The Crusaders' tents were pitched at the barrier of gray water—the slender barrier that must be bridged—before Mansura,

* The Moslems lost Damietta needlessly, by a sudden panic. The amir Fakhr ad-Din in command of the supporting army decided to withdraw from the shore toward Cairo. Disturbed by this retreat, the officers of the Kanana clan, the garrison of the city, hastened to follow him after burning the arsenal, and a general panic seized Damietta. The common soldiery and inhabitants fled from the walls, leaving the gates open and all the bridges standing. The sultan at Cairo blamed Fakhr ad-Din severely and had 51 officers of the garrison strangled.

within sight of the barracks of the Moslem Mamluks across the river. Louis had the greater strength in men; his armored knights had been victorious in the skirmishing upon the road. If he could throw his army across the river in good array, the disordered Mamluks could not stand against him.

He had only three obstacles to contend with—the superior battle craft of the professional Moslem soldiery, their war engines, and the river itself.

For weeks these three obstacles held back the oriflamme. The French set to work to build a mole out into the river to effect a crossing. By wooden sheds and mighty stone casters that they called *chat-castels* they protected the men at work upon the mole.

But the Moslems, while they dug away the bank on their side opposite the mole, wrought havoc among the French engines with their fire casters. It was Joinville's first sight of the Greek fire, and he dreaded it mightily.

"This Greek fire," he said, "was like a great keg with a tail as long as a spear. The noise it made was like thunder, and it resembled a dragon of fire flying through the air. At night it gave so great a light that we could see objects in our camp as clearly as in the day."

Joinville had reason to dread the flying fire that could not be put out, even when it ran like an angry serpent along the ground. He was on guard over the French engines in the night, and if the knights of the guard withdrew from the engines they would be disgraced, while if they remained at their posts within the great wooden machines they might well be burned alive. Every time the Moslems shot a projectile over the river he trembled. The French piled earth around the engines and placed crossbowmen at the end of the mole behind a barricade to harass the Moslems; but in spite of their efforts the Mamluk engineers destroyed the king's machines by a volley of projectiles launched at the same instant. It happened during the day, when Joinville was off duty.

"The Count of Anjou was almost mad at seeing this," he said, "for the engines were under his guard. He wanted to throw himself into the fire, while I and my knights gave thanks to God, for if this attack had come in the night we must all have been burned."

Louis had timbers brought up from the ships—dismantling a great part of his fleet to do so—and the engines rebuilt. To show that no blame attached to the Count of Anjou, he placed them again under his brother's command during the day, and again the Moslems destroyed them—first clearing away the French soldiers by a barrage of missiles and arrows. The feelings of the outraged Lord of Anjou are not related, but Joinville and his knights rejoiced frankly in their second escape.

Then Louis called a council, and the engines were heard of no more. The Moslems had proved more than a match for the French engineers, but De Beaujeu and the Templars had hit upon another way of getting across the river. They had found an Arab who swore that he would lead them to a ford below the town of Mansura where mounted men could safely gain the other bank. It was decided to make the attempt.

MEANWHILE in Cairo there was whispering and fear. Sultan Ayub, the grim and solitary, was no longer to be seen. He had been ailing, and now his hour had come and he no longer appeared in divan or garden court. The whispers said that he had died, but what proof was to be had?

The Mamluk lords still dismounted in his courtyards to go into the Presence and receive their orders. Petitions were still sent in, and official papers came forth signed. The Great Palace held fast to its secret in this time of stress.

The lords of the Mamluks knew, and the black eunuchs of the sultan's chambers knew, and the master of the household knew—but the mobs of Cairo did not—that the sultan lay in his tomb, and

a young slave girl sat in his sitting place. She was Shadjar ad-Darr—Pearl Spray—and she gave the orders to the veteran Mamluks, to Ai Beg the Kurd and to one-eyed Baibars the Panther. She signed the official acts, which were sealed with Ayub's seal. She smiled at the whisperings, and cajoled the officers and filled the slaves of the palace with dread of her anger.

She played at being a king, harkening to all the currents of intrigue that filled the bazars of Cairo. And by her wit she kept the palace quiet while the war went on against the Franks. Ai Beg wooed her, and she promised to wed him; Baibars watched her intently with his one good eye, but she would not reveal to the Panther what she had said to the Kurd. She gathered taxes and sold jewels secretly to buy grain for the Mamluks—she matched treachery with deeper guile, and before long the whispers greeted her: Queen of the Moslems.

In spite of the prophet who had cried that a land ruled by a woman was accursed, Pearl Spray ruled Cairo. No woman since the prophet's wife had ever held dominion over Moslems, but Pearl Spray ruled.

She could not go forth into the public gaze, of course, and the French knights at Mansura dreamed of nothing less than that they were making war upon a girl. Behind the screen of the harem Pearl Spray sat with smooth brow, her henna stained fingers playing with documents of state and her brown eyes meditative. Should the Mamluks gain a victory over the Nazarene knights, she might become indeed Queen of Cairo; should her Mamluks be overthrown she would be cast aside, like a girl slave who has lost her beauty.

So she waited until the day in February when a messenger pigeon came down at the Nasr gate and the message cried at the palace doors:

"Woe to Islam! The Franks are across the river. They have slain Fakhr ad-Din and have raised their standards in the Moslem camp."

BEFORE dawn that day St. Louis and the peers of France were in the saddle, full armed. They left the dark camp under command of the Duke of Burgundy and the Syrian knights, and with De Beaujeu and the Arab guide leading the Templars of the van, they trotted off into the mist to seek the ford. With them went the bulk of the cavalry—the Count of Artois with his knights treading close on the heels of the Templars, along the slippery clay bank of the river, and a regiment of horse archers following. The king himself took command of the main body of the attacking column.

They had agreed that the Templars and the Count of Artois were to advance across the ford, and scatter whatever Moslems might be encountered on the other bank. Then they were to hold their ground until the main force of the cavalry with the king could cross the ford and form in ranks. After that they were to press on toward Mansura, while the infantry, left in the camp, worked to finish the mole and gain contact with the cavalry at the town.

Such was the plan. And as at Damietta, fortune favored Louis. The Arab had not lied. Mist still covered the river when the leading horses splashed into the current, wading through the muddy water that had concealed the ford from them until now.

Not until the Templars had emerged on the far bank were they seen by the Moslem outpost at that end of the ford. Before the onset of the knights the Moslems—only several hundred strong—broke and fled. So the Templars held the bank, and the men of Artois hastened across with the English under the Longsword. Some fourteen hundred horsemen were now on the Moslem bank.

Then Robert of Artois acted on his own account. Seeing the Moslem outposts fleeing toward the gardens of Mansura, he gave order to his followers to go past the Templars and pursue.

"Forward!" he cried. "Forward!"

His knights echoed the cry, when De Sonnac, master of the Temple, rode up and grasped at his rein.

"My Lord," he remonstrated, "bethink thee of the king's command! We must hold to our ranks."

"Then abide where thou wilt," the French count exclaimed, "but I shall not hold back from the enemy."

"My Lord," said Longsword, the English earl, "the host of the enemy lies yonder, and if we ride on, I warrant we shall not ride back again."

The count's hot temper flamed.

"Your crop tailed English are valiant laggards," he gibed.

The insult proved too much for the better sense of the Earl of Salisbury.

"No man may say," he retorted grimly, "that I dare not set my foot where he will go!"

He called to his men, and De Sonnac at the same instant ordered the Templars to advance. With the rash Count of Artois and the French knights leading, they all galloped upon the Moslem tents and the streets of Mansura. And as the other contingents of Crusaders scrambled up the bank, they hastened after the first comers who by now were spread across the plain in a headlong charge without formation—French, Templars and English all striving to lead the way into the Moslem tents. It was a very gallant and disastrous charge.

For an hour it swept everything before it. In the town the Mamluks swarming from their barracks had no time to draw up in ranks. Some of them mounted and fled, others took refuge in the buildings. The amir, Fakhr ad-Din, ran from a bathhouse where a barber had been dyeing his beard, and got to horse scantily clad. A group of Crusaders bore down upon him and killed him.

The charge slowed up in the avenues of tents from which the Moslem archers were sending their shafts. Detachments of the Crusaders forced their way through the alleys of Mansura at the heels of the retreating Mamluks and galloped on, along the road toward Cairo. But the bulk of the cavalry found its path blocked in the town, where the heavily armed knights urged their powerful chargers through narrow alleys that ended in blind walls or courtyards filled with aroused Moslems.

Above their heads and beyond reach of their spears the swarthy Mamluks appeared on the flat roofs of the houses, launching crossbow bolts and javelins at them. Rocks and massive jars dropped from above split the shields of the knights and crushed in their helmets, while arrows took toll of their horses. They had no infantry with them, and they dared not dismount. They gathered into stubborn groups, separated in the streets, and fought hand to hand against the Mamluks who knew every corner and gateway of the town.

True to his word, William Longsword, Earl of Salisbury, pressed on as long as he could carve a way for himself, and was slain with his men. The Templars held their ground valiantly against odds, and without thought of retreat. Three hundred of them perished in the alleys of Mansura with almost all of the mounted archers.

Meanwhile the horsemen of the Count of Poitiers had joined in the fighting that extended over the plain beyond the town and the camp. The battle became a kaleidoscope of individual conflicts, one group ranged itself against another, with men separated from their standards. Into this *mêlée* the one-eyed Panther hurled himself, coming up with his Mamluks who were known as the White Slaves of the River.

His counter-attack was in time to cut off the French knights who were riding back from their pursuit up the Cairo road. Some of them managed to reach Mansura again, but could not pass through the town. Surrounded by Moslems, the Count of Artois was slain, with the Lord of Coucy.

Joinville, it seems, had followed the first wave of the attack. What befell

him and the king of France he relates in his own words.*

II

IT CHANCED [writes Joinville] that my knights and I had passed quite through the army of the Saracens, and saw here and there parties of them—about six thousand in all—who had abandoned their quarters and had advanced into the plain. On seeing that we were separated from the main body, they attacked us boldly and slew Sir Hugues de Trichatel, who bore my banner. They also made prisoner Sir Raoul de Wanon, whom they struck to the ground. As they were carrying him off, we recognized him and spurred our horses to hasten to his assistance. The Turks gave me such heavy blows that my horse could not stand up under them and fell to his knees, throwing me over his head.

I quickly pulled my shield over my breast and picked up my sword, while the Lord Errart d'Esmeray—whose soul may God receive in mercy—came toward me. He also had been struck from his horse by the enemy. We went off together toward an old ruined house to await the coming of the king, and as we did so I managed to recover my horse.

As we were going toward the house a large band of Turks came upon us at the gallop; but they turned aside to a party of our men close by. In passing, they struck me to the ground and snatched my shield from my neck, and galloped over me, thinking that I was dead—and indeed I was very nearly so.

When they had gone my companion, Sir Errart, raised me up, and we reached the walls of the ruined house. There we found Sir Hugues d'Escosse, Sir Ferreys de Loppey, Sir Renault de Menoncourt, and there also the Turks came from all sides to attack us. Some of them forced their way into the walls, and thrust at us with their spears—while my knights gave me my horse which I took by the rein, lest he run away again.

Sir Hugues d'Escosse was desperately hurt, having three lance wounds in the face. Sir Raoul and Sir Ferreys were also badly wounded in their shoulders, so that the blood spouted from them like wine from a tun that is tapped. Sir Errart had been struck in the face by a sword which had cut off his nose, so that it hung down over his mouth.

"Sir," he said to me, "if I did not think you might believe that I did it to save myself, I would go to my Lord of Anjou whom I see in the plain, and beg him to hasten to your aid."

"You will honor and pleasure me, Sir Errart," I replied, "if you go and seek aid for our lives—for your own is also in great peril."

And I said sooth, since he died a little later of the wound he had. All agreed that he should seek assistance, and he mounted his horse and galloped toward the Count of Anjou. There was a great lord with the count, who wished to hold him back from us, but the good Charles would not listen. With his men following he galloped toward us, and the Saracens drew off when they saw him.

A little after this I saw the king. He came up with all his attendants, in a clamor of trumpets. He halted on a rise of ground, and I assure you I never beheld so handsome a man under arms. He towered shoulder high above his company, and his gilded helm was crested with two *fleur-de-lys*, and in his hand he bore a long German sword. At the sight of him my knights and I, all wounded as we were, became impatient to join the battle again with him.

An esquire brought up one of my Flemish war horses, and I was soon mounted and at the side of the king whom I found attended by that experienced man, Sir John de Valeri. Sir John advised him—seeing that the king desired to enter the midst of the fighting—to make for the river on the right, where

* The following extract is adapted—edited, revised and condensed—from the translation of Joinville's chronicle in Bohn's "Chronicles of the Crusades". The present writer was unable to get Joinville's narrative in the medieval French to translate in full himself, at the first writing of the narrative. He has since compared this narrative with the original French text of Joinville, and corrected it.

he might be supported by the Duke of Burgundy and the army that had been left at the camp, and where his men might have water to drink, for the heat was very great.*

As we were doing this, Sir Humbert de Beaujeu, Constable of France, came up and told the king that his brother, the Count of Artois, was hard pressed in a house at Mansura, and entreated the king to go to his aid.

"Spur forward, Constable," cried the king, "and I will follow you close."

All of us now galloped straight to Mansura and into the midst of the Turkish army, where we were separated from each other at once by the greater numbers of the enemy. I kept with the constable, and soon a sergeant came to him, saying that the king was surrounded by Turks and in great danger. Amazed and fearful for the king, we looked around and beheld hundreds of the Turks between us and him—and we were only six in all. I said to the constable that we could never make our way through them—we must circle around them. This we did, taking to a deep ditch by the road, so the Saracens who were occupied with the king's followers did not see us. Perhaps they took us for some of their men.

We came out of the ditch at the river and saw that the king had retired hither, the Saracens pressing after him. They were bringing up fresh forces and striking with mace and sword—until our plight became miserable and some of our men tried to swim their horses over the river toward the Duke of Burgundy, but the horses were worn out, and we saw shields, horses and men go down into the river.

You must believe me when I say that the good king performed that day the most gallant deeds that I ever saw in any battle. Wherever he saw his men distressed he forced himself in and gave such blows with battleax and sword, it was wonderful to behold.

* The French cavalry, which was all across the ford by now, had made a half circle to reach Mansura, so it was now opposite its own camp and the mole that the infantry was trying to throw across the last gap of the river, to advance to the aid of the cavalry.

A small bridge was close at hand, and I said to the constable that we would guard it so that the king might not be attacked from this side. We did this. After some little time the Count Peter of Brittany came to us as we were guarding this bridge. The count was mounted on a short, strong horse, and the reins and the pommel of his saddle had been cut through and destroyed, so that he was forced to hold himself by his two hands round the horse's neck, so that he should not fall off in the path of the Turks who were close behind him. He had been wounded in the face and the blood came out of his mouth like water. He did not, however, seem much afraid, for he turned his head frequently and mocked the Turks.

"Ho!" he cried to us. "By God, have you seen these attendants of mine?"

The constable told me to defend this bridge and not on any account to quit it, while he went to seek for succor. I was sitting quietly there on my horse, having my cousin Sir Jean de Soissons on my right and Sir Pierre de Neuville on my left hand, when a Turk galloped up from where the king was, behind us, and struck Sir Peter so heavy a blow upon the back with his battleax that it flung him across the neck of his horse. Then the Turk crossed the bridge to his own people, hoping that we would abandon our post and follow him, so his companions might gain the bridge.

But we would not quit our post. In front of us were two of the king's heralds, Guillaume de Bron and Jean de Gamaches. Against them the Turks led a rabble on foot, who pelted the twain with large stones. At last they brought up a villainous* Turk on foot who thrice flung Greek fires at them. Once Guillaume de Bron caught the pot of Greek fire on his

* The Christian knights had always held the use of Greek fire and projectiles to be infamous. In this generation of St. Louis, the French chevaliers disdained to make use of the crossbow or longbow. The lance and sword seemed to them to be the only honorable weapons. Joinville's narrative makes clear how the Moslems, unable to stand against the onset of the heavily armed French riders, tried to trick them, or disable them with missiles, or beat them from the saddle. The Moslems made full use of the battleax and iron mace, to break the heavy mail mesh of the knights. It was a contest of gallant gentlemen against professional soldiers.

shield, and good need had he—for if the flames had caught his clothing he must have been burned.

The stones and arrows of the Turks which missed the sergeants hit us. Luckily I found on the ground near me a quilted coat of coarse cloth that had belonged to a Saracen, and by turning the opening inward I made of it a kind of shield which was of great service to me. For I was only wounded in five places while my horse was hurt in fifteen. Soon after, one of my vassals of Joinville brought me a banner with my arms on it and a lance head of which I was in need. Then, when the Turkish villains pressed upon the two heralds, we charged them, bearing the banner, and put them to flight.

When we were returning to our post at the bridge, the good Count de Soissons rallied me about chasing such peasants.

"Seneschal, leave the rabble to brawl and bray," he said, "but by the *Hat of God*, you and I shall yet talk over this day's adventures in the chambers of our ladies."

Toward sunset the constable returned, bringing with him some of the king's crossbowmen on foot. They drew up in front of us, and the Saracens went away when they saw the crossbows make ready to shoot. The constable then said to me: "Seneschal, it is well enough here. Go off to the king and do not leave him until he dismounts in his pavilion."

So I went to the king at the same moment Sir Jean de Valeri came up. The king then took the road to return to his pavilion, and raised the helm from his head, so I gave him my round iron cap which was much lighter than his helm, and cooler. We were riding together thus across the river when the provost Henri came to him and kissed his mailed hand, then the king asked if he had heard tidings of his brother, the Count of Artois.

"Yes," answered the provost. "I have heard that he is now in paradise."

The provost thought to comfort him for the death of his brother, and said—

"Sire, no king of France has gained such honor as you have this day."

"We should praise God for what hath come to us."

So said the king, and heavy tears began to run down his cheeks, which many persons noticed. When we arrived at our quarters, we found our pavilions half up; numbers of Saracens on foot had seized some of the cords and were pulling with all their might, while our servants pulled the other way. De Sonnac, master of the Temple, and I charged this rabble and drove them off from the tent.

So ended this battle, in which many men of grand manners had fled over the river, leaving us few to fight alone. I could mention their names but I will not, because they are dead now.

That evening my people brought me from the main army a tent which the master of the Templars had given me. I had it pitched in front of the engines we had won from the enemy, and after the king had posted a guard of sergeants by the engines, we sought repose, of which, indeed, we had great need, by reason of the wounds and fatigue we had endured in the battle.

Before daybreak, however, we were aroused by cries of "To arms—to arms!" And I made my chamberlain who lay by my side rise and go out to see what was the matter. He returned at once, much frightened, and cried out:

"My Lord, up instantly! The Saracens have defeated the guard and have entered the camp."

I rose at once, threw a quilted jacket on my back, and thrust my iron cap on my head, and roused my people.

"By Saint Nicholas," I cried, "they will not stay here long!"

Wounded as we were, we drove the Saracens from the engines they were seeking to recover. The king, seeing that scarcely any of us had proper armor on, sent Sir Walter of Chastillon, who posted himself between us and the Turks.

Eight of the Turks, armed from head to foot, dismounted and built themselves

a rampart of large stones to shelter them from our crossbows, and from this rampart they shot arrows that often wounded our men. I took counsel with my men at arms as to how we might destroy this rampart.

Now I had a priest called Jean de Waysy, who overheard our talk and did not wait for us to act. Alone, in his quilted jacket and iron cap, with his sword under his arm, with the point dragging so the Saracens would not notice it, he set out toward the Saracens. He came near to them because they took no thought of one man walking out alone. Then he rushed at them furiously, and gave such blows to these eight captains that they could not defend themselves, and took to flight. This astonished all the other Saracens. My priest was well known thereafter to all our army, and men said when they saw him—

"That is the priest who, alone, defeated the Saracens."

This happened during the first day of Lent, and that same day the Saracens elected another chief in the place of him who had died on Shrove Tuesday. The new chief found the body of the Count of Artois among the dead, and took the count's coat of armor, hoisting it before the Turks and Saracens, saying that the king of their enemy had been slain.

Spies [concludes this portion of Joinville's narrative] informed the king of this and said that the enemy, believing him dead, meant to attack us.

III

STOUTLY had the chevaliers of France borne themselves in this battle; long had they held their ground against odds; fearlessly had St. Louis risked his body in the conflict. They had gained a footing across the river, hard by the shambles of Mansura—they had pushed the earth mole across the river, and the king's pavilion was pitched on the far side. They were ready now to advance again.

They had been defeated. The rash onset of the Count of Artois had worked more woe than weal; the flower of the chivalry had perished with the mounted archers in the streets of Mansura.* Half of the French cavalry was dead, missing or wounded, and with the shattering of the cavalry, the army lost its power to attack.

Like bees whose hive has been broken in, the Mamluks swarmed about Mansura. And the messenger pigeons flew north to the palace of Cairo where Pearl Spray waited, with tidings of victory. The feeling in the city changed overnight from despondency to rejoicing. The streets were illuminated—musicians came forth to chant in triumph, and Mamluks riding through the streets were showered with the blessings of the populace that had been ready to flee the day before.

In the evening before the battle of Shrove Tuesday, the son of the late sultan, Turan Shah, had arrived at the Mansura camp after riding from the far side of Syria to take command against the Crusaders. Turan Shah, more cruel than the Mamluks and even at the age of twenty-five a prey to his vices, still had the instinct of leadership in war, and although he was practically a stranger to the Mamluks, his orders were obeyed in the crisis.

During the battle the Crusaders, unknowing, had almost taken him captive in one of the Mansura palaces; but as soon as order was restored the sultan's son—who was the new chieftain mentioned by Joinville—prepared to move against the Christians. While he mustered his cavalry, he dismantled a fleet of galleys at Cairo and had the timbers

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* The Moslem annals give a clear account of the crisis of the battle:

"The whole cavalry of the French advanced to Mansura, and after forcing one of the gates, entered the town while the Moslems fled to right and left. The king of France had penetrated as far as the sultan's palace and victory seemed to be his, when the Baharite slaves led by Baibars came forward and snatched it from his hands. Their charge was so furious that the French were forced to retreat.

"During this time the French infantry had advanced as far as the bridge. Had they been able to join the cavalry, the defeat of the Egyptian army and the loss of Mansura would have been inevitable.

"At nightfall the French retreated in disorder, leaving fifteen hundred of their horsemen on the field. They surrounded their camp with a wall; but their army was divided into two bodies, the lesser camped on the branch of the Ashmun, the greater on the large branch of the Nile that runs to Damietta."

transported on camel back down the river to a point below the two camps of the Crusaders, between them and Damietta.

But he did not wait for the galleys to be rebuilt before he struck at the French king to drive him from the Mansura side of the river. For this blow he found the veteran soldiers under the Panther more than ready.

Joinville, who had ample opportunity to make their acquaintance thereafter, explains the character of these soldier-slaves recruited from every people and trained to lifelong service in arms—a kind of Foreign legion that was, with the Mongol army, perhaps the only professional soldiery of the time:

"It is needful to tell you how the sultan gained his men at arms and how his army was made up. It is true that the greater part of his chivalry was formed by foreigners* whom the merchants of the sea had bought when young and whom the Egyptians purchased. They came mostly from the coast. The children born from these captives the sultan supported and educated, and taught the use of weapons and bows—often watching them display their skill before him.

"As they gained strength, their small weapons were exchanged for full sized arms, and when their beards grew they became knights. These youths bore the arms of the sultan and were called *Bahairiz;* their emblazonments were like his of pure gold, save that, to distinguish one from another, they added red bars with roses, birds, griffins or other devices. They were called the *Halka* or king's guard.

"When the sultan wanted anything, he summoned the commander of the *Halka,* who mustered the guard by sounding clarions, trumpets and drums, and told to them the pleasure of the sultan—which they instantly obeyed. When the sultan went to war, he appointed captains called amirs from the ranks of the *Halka* to command his other men at arms. And, as they displayed merit, the sultan rewarded them more, so that every one tried to surpass the other."

On Friday of that week Baibars and his White Slaves of the River, the *Halka,* the regiments of Cairo and the Arab clans assailed the lines of the Christians across the river. The roar of *Allahu akbar* and the Mamluk drums drowned the battle shout of *Montjoie, St. Denis.*

Through the stress of the battle moved the tall figure of the French king, the *fleur-de-lys* gleaming on his helmet. Tranquil and confident, he went among his knights, looking eagerly for signs of the victory that would open the road to Cairo. He watched the Mamluks advance in separate squares with infantry thrown before them to cast liquid fire at the line of the Crusaders. He saved the battalion of the Count of Anjou from rout, although the hide and tail of his own horse was scorched by the flames.

He saw the Moslems burn the wooden barrier before the line of the master of the Temple, and go through the fire to rout the Templars, after De Sonnac, who had lost the sight of one eye on Tuesday, was slain. He watched De Malvoisin escape the fire projectiles and drive back the Moslems. He heard that the Count of Flanders held good his ground, and that his brother, the Count of Poitiers, had been taken captive, and freed by a strange and unlooked for rush of the women and butchers and hangers-on of the Christian camp, who assailed the Moslem horsemen with axes and staves and knives . . .

And at sunset the French still held their lines, when St. Louis went among them, being weary himself but mindful of their hurts—for many a chevalier had died that day—and spoke with them.

"My lords and friends, our Lord hath shown us grace this day, for we have defended ourselves, very many of us being without arms, while they were full armed and on their own ground."

* At this time the Mamluks were recruited mostly from the Bulgars, the Kharesmian Turks, Tartars of the Golden Horde and Turkomans. Many Georgian and Circassian boys were also brought to Cairo. So the bulk of the Mamluks were white—the Turks were a white race. They were brought up in the faith of Islam, and many were volunteers from far Asia. For more than five centuries, unruly as they were, they ruled Egypt—only at times under the overlordship of Constantinople—until the coming of Napoleon.

"This battle of Friday," Joinville said ruefully, "was marvelous sharp and severe."

It became clear to the king that he could not advance toward Cairo; but he would not retire from his new position. The Moslems were willing to grant him a respite while they extended their lines to surround the Christian army, and waited for their fleet to come into action down the river.

Three weeks passed, and ships ceased to come up the river from Damietta to the Christian camp. Food became scarce, and wounds festered in the airless, moist heat of the delta. The Crusaders could not go beyond their lines, nor could they discover why the ships did not come to them with supplies.

Meanwhile something had happened to try the spirits of the knights who had paid no heed to the mocking of the Mamluks who rode over to taunt them. Joinville witnessed it and told what befell thereafter.

IV

AFTER eight or ten days [writes Joinville] the bodies of the slain which had been thrown into the river rose to the top of the water. It was said that this always happens when the gall is burst. These bodies floated down the river until they came to the small bridge that joined the two portions of our army together. The arch of the bridge was so low it almost touched the water and kept the bodies from floating underneath, so that the river became covered with them, and the water could not be seen a good stone's throw from the bridge upward.

The king hired men who labored for eight days separating the bodies of the Christians from the Saracens; the Saracen bodies they thrust under the bridge by sheer force, floating them down to the sea; but the Christians were buried in deep graves, one over the other. God knows how great was the stench, and what misery it was to see the bodies of such noble and worthy men lying so exposed. I watched many hunting the bodies of their friends. They did not find the bodies, but they themselves were weakened by the infection.

It was the time of Lent, and you should know that we had no fish to eat but eels, which are gluttonous fish and feed on dead bodies. From this, and the bad air of the country, the whole army was affected by a disease that dried up our flesh and tanned our skins black as the earth. Eating such fish also rotted the gums.

This disease increased so much that the barbers were called upon to cut the rotten flesh from the gums, so that their patients could eat. It was pitiful to hear the cries of those on whom the operation was being performed; they seemed like to the cries of women in labor. Some of the afflicted men began bleeding at the nose, and when that happened they died.

After some days the Turks, who knew our plight, made shift to cure us by starvation, and I shall tell you how they did it.

They had drawn their galleys overland and launched them again a good league below our army, so that those of us who had gone down to Damietta for provisions never returned—to our great astonishment. We knew nothing of this until a small galley of the Earl of Flanders, having forced a passage through to us, related how the Turks had their galleys below us, and had already captured four score of ours and killed the crews.

Because of this all provision was exceeding dear in the army, and when Easter arrived a beef was sold for eighty livres, a sheep or hog for thirty livres, a muid of wine for ten livres, and an egg for a dozen pennies.

At this time I was confined to my bed, having been grievously wounded in the battle of Shrove Tuesday. I had besides, the camp plague in my legs and mouth and such a rheum in my head it ran through my mouth and nostrils. Moreover, I had a double fever called a quartan, from which God defend us!

Even my priest had the plague, and one day when he was chanting the Mass he became so weak that I leaped out of bed without breeches on, to support him. He finished his chanting, but that was his last Mass . . .

When the king and his barons saw that there was no remedy for these ills, they withdrew the army from the Cairo side of the river to the camp of the Duke of Burgundy.* It is true that they held some parleys with the council of the sultan. But the Turks refused to accept of any hostage other than the person of the king, and it were better that we should all be slain than that we should give our king in pawn.

Then the good king, Saint Louis, seeing the miserable condition of his army, understood that he could no longer remain where he was, and gave order to march on the Tuesday evening after the octave of Easter, and return to Damietta.

He gave commands to the masters of the galleys to have them ready to convey the sick and wounded to Damietta. He likewise ordered Josselin de Corvant and the other engineers to cut the cords that held the bridges between us and the Saracens; but they neglected to do so, which was the cause of so much evil befalling us.

Seeing that every one was making ready to go to Damietta, I went on board my vessel in the afternoon with two of my knights—all that remained to me—and the survivors of my household.

When it began to grow dark I ordered my seamen to raise the anchor, that we might float down the current; but they replied that they dared not, for the galleys of the sultan were between us and Damietta.

The king's seamen had made great fires on board their vessels to care for the unfortunate sick men. Many of the disabled were waiting on the bank to be taken on the vessels. As I was urging my sailors to make some little way I saw, by the light of these fires, the Saracens enter our camp and murder our sick. The sailors of the king's ships were drawing in to the bank when they saw the Saracens killing the sick who were waiting to be taken off, and they rowed back to the larger galleys, cut the cables, and drifted down upon my small bark. My men drew up the anchor and we began to move downward. I expected that the galleys would sink me, but we escaped and began to make way down the river.

Then the king appeared at the shore. He had the same illness as the rest of us, with dysentery as well, which he might have prevented if he had been willing to live on his large galleys. That evening he fainted more than once because of this dysentery he had, and so often did he go off to perform his needs that they had to cut away the bottom of his drawers. But he said if it pleased God, he would never leave his people. Now, observing us make off, his men began to shout to us to remain, and likewise shot bolts at us to stop our course.

I will now tell you in what manner the king was made prisoner, as he told me himself hereafter. He said that he had quitted his own battalion, and with Sir Geoffrey de Sergines, had joined the battalion of de Chastillon who commanded the rear.* The king was mounted on a small courser with only a housing of silk. De Sergines alone attended him as far as a village, where the Turks beset them.

Thrice did Chastillon, sword in hand, charge the Turks, driving them from the street of the village to the fields at the end. He was bare of armor, having only the sword in his hand. As they rode away from him they shot arrows back at him, and when they had gone off, he drew the arrows from his body and his horse. Then he came to the king, sitting on his horse, who extended his sword arm, crying:

* They went back to their first camp and the ground they had occupied across the river before the first battle.

* Louis had planned to destroy the bridges behind him, to burn his tents and baggage and place the disabled men in the boats, under guard of detachments of knights. Then the able-bodied men were to make their way down the river beside the galleys. But the bridges were not destroyed; the Moslems entered the camp in the disorder of the retreat, and the fire enabled them to see exactly what was happening. Only a handful of the army reached Damietta.

"Chastillon—Sir Knight—where are my valiant men?" But Chastillon, turning about, saw the Turks again, and ran at them.

I heard that Sir Geoffrey guarded his lord by taking his pike under his arm and charging the Saracens every time they drew near, driving them off. At the village, having dismounted, he entered a house and laid the king in the lap of a woman from Paris, for he had no hope that the king could pass that day without dying.

Soon after arrived Sir Philip de Montfort who told the king he had just seen the amir of the sultan with whom he had formerly treated for peace, and if it were the king's pleasure he would go back to him and renew the parley.

The king entreated him to do so, and said that he would abide by whatever terms they agreed upon.

Sir Philip went back to the Saracen, but just at that moment a villainous sergeant named Marcel set up a shout to our people.—

"Lords, knights, yield yourselves, for the king commands it!"

At these words all were thunderstruck, and—thinking that the king had indeed given the order, they yielded their swords and staves to the Saracens. Then the amir—who had lifted his turban from his head and had taken away the seal ring from his finger to show that he would grant the truce—seeing the Saracens leading in the king's knights as their prisoners, said to Sir Philip that he would not agree to any truce, for the army had been made prisoner . . .

WE WHO had embarked on our vessels, thinking to escape to Damietta were not more fortunate than those who had kept to the land, for we were also taken as you shall hear.

It is true that a wind rose up behind us, driving us down upon the Saracens, and the knights fled, who had been left by the king in light boats to guard the sick. Toward daybreak we reached the place in the river where the sultan's galleys lay. When they perceived us they set up a great noise and shot at us large bolts covered with Greek fire, so that it seemed as if the stars were falling from the heavens. The wind blew more than ever, and drove us toward the bank of the river, where we found the light boats of the knights who had been ordered to guard the sick. On the opposite shore were great numbers of our vessels that the Saracens had taken—we could see them plainly, murdering the crews, and throwing the dead bodies into the water and carrying away the chests and arms. And mounted Saracens shot arrows at us from the bank of the river.

I put on my armor, to keep the bolts from hurting me. Some of my people called to me from the stern—

"My Lord, my Lord, your sailors mean to run us on shore, because the Saracens threaten them."

I was then very ill, but I rose at once and, drawing my sword, I swore that I would kill the first person who tried to run us on shore. The sailors responded that we could not go on, and I must choose between landing on the shore or anchoring in mid-stream. I said to them that I would anchor in the river rather than to be carried to the shore where our men were being murdered. The sailors cast out the anchor.

It was not long before we saw four of the sultan's galleys making toward us. I called to my knights to advise me whether to surrender to the galleys of the sultan or those along the shore, and we agreed that it would be better to surrender to the galleys that were coming, for then we might be able to keep together.

Then a cellarer of mine who was born at Doulevant said—

"My Lord, I do not agree to that."

I asked him why he did not agree, and he said—

"I believe we ought all to let ourselves be killed, because then we will all go to paradise."

But we did not agree to that.

Seeing that we must surrender, I took

the small casket containing my jewels and relics, and cast it into the river. One of my sailors said to me—

"My Lord, if you do not let me say that you are the king's cousin, they will kill you, and us with you."

I bade him say what he pleased.

When the first galley came athwart us and dropped anchor close to our bow, the people on it heard these words. Then God sent to my aid a Saracen who was a subject of the emperor.* Wearing only breeches of coarse cloth, and swimming straight over to my vessel, he clasped my knees and said:

"My Lord, if you do not do as I bid you, there is no hope for you. Leap into the river here, where you will not be seen by the men of the galley who are thinking only of spoiling your bark."

He called to the galley then, and had a rope thrown across to us. Holding the cord, I leaped into the water, followed by the Saracen. I was so weak that I should have sunk if he had not helped me to the galley. They pulled me up to the deck of the galley, where I saw some fourteen score Saracens. All the time the poor man held me fast in his arms, and presently landed with me. Immediately others rushed at me to cut my throat, for he who slew a Christian imagined that he gained honor thereby.

Twice they threw me to the ground, and once to my knees, and then I felt the knife at my throat.

Yet this Saracen who had saved me from drowning would not quit hold of me, but cried out to them—

"The king's cousin—the king's cousin!"

And he was able to lead me to the castle where the Saracen knights were gathered.

When I was brought before them they took off my coat of mail; and from pity, seeing me so very ill, they flung over me one of my own scarlet surcoats lined with miniver which my lady mother had given me. Another brought me a white leather girdle, with which I girthed the surcoat around me. One of the Saracen knights gave me a small cap which I put on my head; but I soon began to tremble, as much from the fright I had had as from my disorder. When I complained of thirst they brought me some water in a pot, but when I drank a little it ran back through my nostrils. When my own attendants saw this they began to weep. God knows what a pitiful state I was in, with the disease that nearly closed my throat.

The good Saracen asked my people why they wept, and when he understood my sickness, he spoke of it to one of the Saracen knights who bade him tell me to take comfort as they would give me somewhat to drink that would cure me in two days. This he did, and I was soon well, through God's mercy and the draft the Saracens gave me.

Afterward the admiral* of the sultan's galleys sent for me and asked if I were cousin to the king, as it was said. I told him I was not, and explained why my sailors had said it through fear of the Saracens. The admiral replied that they had advised me well, because otherwise we would have been slain and thrown into the river. He then asked if I had any blood tie with the emperor *Ferrey* (Frederick) of Germany. I answered truly that I thought that Madame my mother was his second cousin. The admiral replied that he would love me the better for that.

On the Sunday after my capture, he ordered us all to be fetched from the castle, down to the bank of the river. While waiting there I saw Monseigneur Jean, my chaplain, dragged out of a hold of a galley. On coming into the open air he fainted and the Saracens killed him, flinging him into the stream before my eyes. His clerk also, who was suffering from the common disorder of the army and unable to stand, they killed by casting a heavy mortar on his head, and flung him after his master.

In like manner the Saracens dealt with the other prisoners, posting themselves with bare swords about the hold through

* Evidently Frederick II, who had many Moslem subjects in Sicily and elsewhere.

* Joinville writes admiral for amir, or rather *al amir*. The word admiral originated in this way with the Crusaders.

which our men were drawn. When they saw any one weak or ill, they killed him and threw him into the water.

I told them, through the interpretation of my Saracen who never left me, that they were doing wrong. For it was against the custom of Saladin, who said that no man should be killed who had eaten of his bread and salt. The admiral made answer that they were destroying men who were ill and of no use. And he had my own men brought before us, saying that my men had all denied their faith. I replied that I did not put much trust in them, for they would forsake his faith as quickly as they had forsaken mine if the opportunity offered.

The admiral assented to this, adding that Saladin had said that a Christian never made a good infidel, nor a good Saracen a Christian. Soon after this he made me mount a palfrey and we rode side by side over a bridge to Mansura where Saint Louis and his men were prisoners.

At the entrance of a large pavilion we found a secretary writing down the names of the prisoners, and there I was made to declare my name, which I no way wished to conceal, and it was written down with the others. As we entered the pavilion the Saracen who had never left me said:

"Sir, I will not go in with you, for I can not follow you further. I beg that you will never quit the hand of this young boy you have with you, otherwise the Saracens will carry him off!"

The boy's name was Bartholomew and he was a bastard of the Lord Montfaucon de Bar. The admiral led me and the little boy into the enclosure where were the barons of France and more than ten thousand other persons with them. They greeted me with pleasure and joyful noise, for they had thought me slain.

Many knights and other men were confined here in a large court surrounded with mud walls. The guards of this prison led them out one at a time and asked each if he would become a renegade. If they said they would, they were taken elsewhere; if they refused they had their heads cut off. Shortly after I came the council of the sultan sent for the barons, and demanded of us to whom they should deliver a message they had from the sultan. We answered, all of us, by the interpreter, that the message should be given to the Count Peter of Brittany. This was the message—

"Lord, the sultan sends us to find out if you wish to be freed."

"Yes, we do," the count answered.

"And what price will you pay for your freedom?"

"Whatever we can, in reason."

"Will you give any of the castles of the Holy Land?"

"We can not do that, because the castles belong to the emperor of Germany."

The council then asked if we would not surrender some of the castles belonging to the Knights Templar or the Hospital. The count replied for us that this, also, was impossible, for the garrisons of those castles had sworn on holy relics that they would yield them to no man.

The Saracens then spoke together, and said to us that it did not seem as if we much desired to regain our freedom, and that they would send to us those who knew well how to use their swords and who would deal with us. But they sent to us a messenger instead who assured us that we were to be freed, because our king would ransom us.

In order to try the king, the sultan's council had made the same demands of him as of us. But the good king Saint Louis answered as we had done, although the council threatened to torture him. The good king held all their menaces cheap, saying that since he was their prisoner they could do with him as they wished. Finding that they could not overcome him by threats, the council asked him how much money he would give for his release—in addition to Damietta which was also to be surrendered. So the king engaged cheerfully to pay five hundred thousand livres for the ransom of his army, and for his own ransom to yield the city of Damietta—

since he was of a rank in which bodily ransom could not be estimated in money.

When the sultan heard the good disposition of the king, he said:

"By my faith, the Frenchman is generous not to bargain about so great a sum of money. He has agreed to the first demand. Go and tell him that I make him a present of a hundred thousand livres, so that he will only have to pay four hundred thousand."

V

UNKNOWN to the captive barons of France, revolt simmered in the Moslem camp and the palaces of Cairo. The man who was sultan in name, Turan Shah, who had granted terms to the Nazarenes, had also deprived of their rank several powerful Mamluks, confiscating their wealth for his own officers and turning against him the triumvirate that had carried on the war against the Crusaders—that strange triumvirate of Pearl Spray, and the Turkoman and the Panther.*

It was a perilous matter to brave the victorious Mamluks in this fashion; the war had virtually ended, and the Mamluks saw clearly that power could not be shared between them and the Turan Shah. One must yield to the other, and secretly the Mamluks conspired to slay the sultan who was the last descendant of Saladin's lineage to rule in Egypt. What followed Joinville beheld in part, or heard related.

The conspirators [his account continues] held council with the admiral of the late sultan who had been dismissed from his office, and they won over to their plan the *Halka* who have the guard of the sultan's person, and prevailed upon them to slay the sultan, which they promised to do.

They went to work with caution, for they ordered the trumpets and drums to sound for the assembling of the army to know the sultan's will. The admirals and their accomplices told the officers of the army that Damietta had been taken, and the sultan was marching thither and that he ordered them to arm and follow him. At once the officers set off at a gallop toward Damietta. We were frightened when we saw them go off like this, for we really believed Damietta had been stormed.

We were then lodged in a galley anchored before the quarters of the sultan, a great enclosure of fir wood poles covered with painted cloth. A high pavilion had been pitched at the entrance of this place, and within it a handsome gateway with a tower. Within this was a fine garden wherein stood the sultan's lodgings, with a great tower from which he could look out over the country. From the garden an alley led to the river, and at the end of the alley the sultan had built himself a summerhouse on the beach where he bathed. This summerhouse was of trellis work covered with Indian linen.

That day the sultan invited the knights of the *Halka* to dine with him in his quarters. After the dinner he had taken leave of his admirals and was about to retire to his own chamber, when one of these knights, his swordbearer, struck him with a sword. The blow fell upon his hand, splitting it between the four fingers.

The sultan cried to his admirals, who had really been the instigators of the attack—

"Witness ye that my men of the *Halka* have attacked me—look at my hand."

"We see," they responded, "and now surely you will slay us. It is better for us that you should die."

Then the sultan understood that they had conspired against him. He fled to the high watch tower that I have mentioned, behind his chambers. Already the men of the *Halka* were destroying his other pavilions and surrounding his quar-

* "The sultan had confidence only in a few favorites," the Egyptian historian Makrisi relates, "to whom he gave the chief offices of the state, displacing the old ministers of the late sultan his father. Above all, he showed dislike of the Mamluks, although they had gained the last victory for him. His debaucheries wasted the revenues, and he forced the sultana Shadjar ad-Darr to render him an account of the riches of his father. The sultana implored the protection of the Mamluks. These slaves, already angered at Turan Shah, did not hesitate to take her part, and resolved to assassinate the prince."

ters. Within the tower where he had hidden himself were three of his priests who had just dined with him. They bade him descend, and he replied that he would do so willingly, if they would answer for his safety.

But the men outside cried to him that they would fetch him out by force. They cast some Greek fire into the tower, which being made only of fir and cotton cloth, as I have said, began to blaze all over. Never have I beheld a bonfire so fine, nor so sudden.

When the sultan saw the fire gaining ground on all sides, he went down into the garden of which I have spoken and ran down the alley toward the river. But as he fled one of the *Halka* struck him a fierce blow in the ribs with a sword. Then he flung himself, with the sword hanging from him, into the Nile, near our galley.

Nine other men pursued him in a boat and killed him within our sight.

One of these knights whose name was Faracatai, seeing the sultan dead, cut him in twain and tore the heart from his vitals. Then he entered our galley and came before the king with his hands all bloodied, saying:

"What wilt thou give me, who have slain thine enemy, who—if he had lived—would have put thee to death?"

But the good king Louis made no answer whatever.

After this about thirty of them climbed into our galley with their swords drawn and their battleaxes on their necks. I asked Sir Baldwin d'Ibelin, who understood Saracenic, what they were saying. He replied that they said they were come to cut off our heads. Soon after I saw a large group of our people confessing themselves to a monk of La Trinité who was of the company of the Count of Flanders. But I could not think of any sin or evil I had done—only that I was about to receive my death.

So I fell on my knees, making the sign of the cross. Sir Guy d'Ibelin, constable of Cyprus, knelt beside me and confessed himself to me, and I gave him such absolution as God may have granted me the power of bestowing. But of all the things he said to me, when I rose up I could not remember one of them.

We were led down into the hold of the galley and laid heads and heels together. We thought this was so that they could make away with us one at a time. For the whole night we lay bound in this manner. I had my feet right in the face of the Count Peter of Brittany, whose feet in turn were beside my face.

On the morrow we were taken out of the hold and the admirals sent to us to say that we might renew with them the treaty we had made with the sultan. The king was to swear to give over to them two hundred thousand livres before he quitted the river, and the other two hundred thousand he should pay in Acre.*

The oath to be taken by the king and the admirals was drawn up in writing. On their part they swore that if they failed in their word they would hold themselves as dishonored as if they had gone bareheaded on pilgrimage to Mecca, or had eaten pork, or had divorced their wives and taken them back again.

According to the law of Mahomet, no one could divorce his wife and take her back again without first looking on while another man enjoyed her—after which he could take her back.

The king accepted this oath of theirs because Master Nicolle of Acre who knew their customs well, assured him they could not have sworn a greater oath.

After the admirals had sworn, they sent to the king a written oath drawn up by advice of some Christian renegades they had with them. The king swore first that if he failed to keep his word, he would hold himself outcast from the presence of God. Then they bade him swear that if he broke his word, he should be perjured as a Christian who had denied God, and that in despite of God he would

* The women played a great part in saving the French chivalry. The Mamluk rebels were half inclined to slaughter all the invaders, but Pearl Spray in Cairo, through the high amirs, prevailed on them to hold to Turan Shah's treaty. And Queen Marguerite, holding Damietta with its garrison, made it clear that the city would not be yielded except by order of the king.

The death of Turan Shah marked the end of Saladin's descendants, and the rise of the formidable Mamluk slave-warriors. The disaster to the French king was the beginning of Moslem supremacy.

spit on the cross and trample it underfoot. But when the king heard this oath read, he said that he would never take it.

Hearing the king had refused, the admirals were greatly discontented—for that they had sworn, and he had refused to do so. Master Nicolle told the king that he was certain that unless he took the full oath the Saracens would behead him and his people.

The king replied that they might do as they pleased. At that time the patriarch of Jerusalem was with the king; he was eighty years old or thereabout, and had persuaded the Saracens to give him a safe conduct, to join the king. Now the admirals said that it was the patriarch who had influenced the king.

They seized the good patriarch and tied him to a post before the king, and bound his hands behind his back so tight that they swelled as big as his head, and the blood spouted out.

"Ah, Sire!" he cried out, from the sufferings he endured. "Swear boldly for I will take the whole sin of it on my conscience!"

I know not how the oath was taken at last, but the admirals held themselves satisfied at last with the oaths of the king and his barons. They ordered their trumpets and drums to sound merrily before the king's tent, and it was said that some of them wished to choose him sultan, for the king was the proudest Christian they ever knew. They said too that if Muhammad had allowed them to suffer what God had caused the king to endure, they would have lost faith in him.

The king asked me if I thought he should take the kingship of Egypt if they offered it to him. And I said he would be a fool to do so, since they had just killed their king. And he said truly he would not refuse it.

YOU MUST know [continues Joinville] that the good queen was not without her share of persecution, and very bitter it was to her heart, as you shall hear.

Three days before she was brought to bed with child, she was told that the good king her husband had been made prisoner. This so troubled her mind that she seemed at all times to see her chamber in Damietta filled with Saracens ready to slay her, and she kept crying out incessantly, "Help, help!" when there was not an enemy near her.

For fear that the child in her womb should perish, she made a knight watch at the foot of her bed all through the night without sleeping. This knight was very old—not less than eighty years or perhaps more—and every time she screamed, he held her hands, and said:

"Madame, do not take fright like this. I am with you; rid yourself of these fears."

Before the good lady was brought to bed, she once ordered every person to leave her room except this very old knight; then she cast herself out of bed on her knees before him, and requested that he would grant her a boon. The knight promised, with an oath, that he would do so.

"Sir Knight," the queen then said, "I request on the oath you have sworn, that if the Saracens storm this city and take it, you will cut my head from my body before they seize it."

The knight replied that he would cheerfully do so, and that he had thought of it himself before then.

The day she was brought to bed it was told her that the Pisans, the Genoese and the common men in the town were about to fly, and forsake the king. The queen sent for some of them, and spoke to them:

"Gentlemen, I beg of you for the love of God, that you will not quit this city. For well you know that if you do my lord the king and his whole army will be left without support. Have pity at least upon this person who beseeches you, lying in pain."

They answered that they could not remain longer in a city where they were dying of hunger.* She said then that they

* There were provisions enough in the fleet. The Genoese and Pisans who had ferried the French over were disgruntled by the offer St. Louis had made, in his first attempt to negotiate a peace, to exchange Damietta for Jerusalem. This was refused by Turan Shah. Now that the French Crusaders had been decisively defeated, the Italian merchant-mariners were quite willing to sail off, leaving the survivors stranded in Egypt. It is doubtful if Queen Marguerite's plea would have influenced them to remain, but the supplie she purchased at prohibitive cost from them did induce them to wait.

would not die of hunger, because she would buy up all the provision in the name of the king. This she was obliged to do, and all the provision that could be found was bought up, at a cost of three hundred and sixty thousand livres, to feed these people.

Shortly after, the queen was delivered of a son in the city of Damietta, whose name was John and his surname Tristan because he had been born in misery. The good lady was forced to rise before she was fully recovered, and embark on the ships, for Damietta was to be surrendered to the Saracens.

On the morrow of the feast of the Ascension of our Lord, at sunrise, Sir Geoffrey de Sergines went to the city and delivered it to the admirals, and instantly the banners of the sultan were displayed on the walls. The Saracens entered the city and drank of the wines they found there until the greater part of them were drunk. One of the admirals who was against us in all things came to the bank of the river and shouted out to those in our galley that they were to take us back to Cairo.

We should have been delivered with the king at sunrise; but they had kept us until sunset, and we had had nothing to eat. The admirals also did not eat, for they were gathered together to dispute about us.

"We shall kill the king and these lords," one said, "and for forty years no more will come against us—for their sons are small, and we have Damietta."

"If we slay the king," another Saracen said against this, "as well as the sultan, it will be said that there is no faith in the Egyptians."

"In doing as we did to the sultan," said the first Saracen, "we went against the command of Mahomet. Now listen to another command—*For the surety of the faith, slay the enemies of the law!* How dare we break two commands, and spare the greatest of the infidels?"

However, as God willed it, the admirals consulted together at sunset and agreed that we were to be released. So we were brought to Damietta and our galleys moored close to the shore. We asked permission to land, but they would not allow it until we had refreshed ourselves—for the Saracens said it would be a shame to the admirals to send us fasting from our prison.

Soon after, they sent us provisions, that is to say loaves of cheese that had been baked in the sun, with hard eggs, the shells of which they had painted with colors to honor us. When we had eaten some little, they put us on shore and we went toward the king, whom the Saracens were leading from the pavilion where they had detained him, toward the water's edge. They surrounded the king on foot, with drawn swords.

It happened that a Genoese galley was on the river opposite the king. Only one man could be seen on the galley, but when he saw the king he whistled. Instantly four score crossbowmen with their bows bent and shafts placed leaped on the deck from below. The Saracens no sooner saw them than they ran away like sheep—not more than three or four staying by the king. The Genoese thrust a plank on shore and took on board the king, his brother the Count of Anjou, Sir Geoffrey de Sergines, and the marshal of France and myself. The Count of Poitiers remained prisoner with the Saracens until the king should pay the ransom, which he was bound to pay before he quitted the river.

Then the Count of Flanders and many other great lords came to take leave of the king and to embark in their galleys for France. With them was the Count of Brittany, grievously sick, so that he lived no more than three weeks.

The whole of Saturday and Sunday was taken up in paying the money of the ransom by weight. Before it was all paid, Philippe de Nemours advised the king to withhold a part until the Saracens should have given up his brother; but he was angered and replied that since he had promised it he would pay the whole before he quitted the river. As he said this, Sir Philippe de Montfort told the king that the Saracens had miscounted one scale

weight which was worth ten thousand livres. The king commanded Sir Philippe on the faith he owed him as liege-man to make up to the Saracens these ten thousand livres.

At this others entreated the king to go out to a galley that was awaiting him at sea, to be out of the hands of the Saracens, and at length prevailed on him to do so.

So at last we began to make some way at sea, putting a league between us and the shore, without a word said—for we were all concerned for the Count of Poitiers. In a little while Sir Philippe, who had remained to make good the payment of the ten thousand livres came out to us, calling to the king—

"Sire, Sire—your brother the count is following in the other galley."

The king then turned to those near him and said—

"Light up, light up!"

And there was great joy among us all on the coming of his brother. A poor fisherman having hastened to the Countess of Poitiers with the tidings was given twenty livres of Paris. And then each of us sought his own galley and we left Egypt.

The king had no other robes than two garments the sultan had caused to be made for him of black silken stuff lined with squirrel skins. During this voyage to Acre I also was ill, and was always seated near the king, and it was then he told me how he had been taken and how he had ransomed us. At times he mourned for the death of his brother the Count of Artois.

One day it pleased him to ask what the Count of Anjou was doing—for although he was in the same galley, the count had not sought his company. The king was told that his brother was playing at tables with Sir Walter of Nemours. Although he could barely stand by reason of his long illness, he arose hastily and went staggering to where they were at play. Then, seizing the dice and tables, he flung them into the sea, and was in a passion with his brother for amusing himself by gaming, forgetful of the death of the Count of Artois and of the great perils from which the Lord had delivered them.

But Sir Walter was best paid, because the king tossed into his lap all the coins—of which there were a great pile—on the tables, and Sir Walter carried them all off. [So Joinville concludes the story of his captivity.]

VI

THE FRENCH chivalry had failed utterly in Egypt. Never had Crusaders suffered a defeat so disastrous as the second battle of Mansura. With the collapse of the expedition, St. Louis gave permission to his surviving brothers to return with the great lords to France. But he would not accompany them.

He felt that the honor of the French arms and of Christendom had suffered at his hands on the Nile, and for four years he lingered upon the coast of the Holy Land, hoping to strike a blow for Jerusalem. He had made a ten years' truce with the Mamluks, and he sought to gain by negotiation what he had been unable to win by arms. But without an army he could gain little. Only a hundred knights remained with him of the twenty-eight hundred who had assembled at Cyprus, and the survivors had brought the taint of the plague with them from the Nile.

"I was lodged," Joinville wrote, "with the rector of Acre and was most grievously ill. Of all my servants there was but one who was not confined to his bed with sickness like myself. The more to enliven me I saw some twenty corpses pass my window daily for burial, with the chant *Libera me Domine . . .*"

"We seemed a subject for mockery on all parts, for we enjoyed neither peace nor truce from the admirals. You must know that we could never muster in our army more than about one thousand four hundred men at arms fit for service."

Yet they regained their health, and the king rebuilt the walls of the coast towns, and made sallies inland; he received ambassadors from the Assassins of Massiaf.

Joinville marveled much at these strange envoys who, he said, carried in their hands the death of kings. They complained of having to pay tribute to the Templars and Hospitallers, because they could not intimidate the soldier-monks with their daggers—if one master of the order was slain, another took his place at once.

Joinville heard the gossip of the great trade routes, and all the legends of the Nearer East. He thought that Prester John ruled a Christian kingdom in the sandy wastes beyond Gog and Magog, and that the "grand cham of Tartary" had made war against Prester John.

A gift from the Old Man of the Mountain was presented to the king—an elephant of crystal, and crystal figures of men, set in pieces of amber bordered with gold. When the casket containing this gift was opened, a strong and sweet odor spread through the chamber.

Zealously the king gathered relics from the coast shrines of the Holy Land, to bear back to France, where he had built the Sainte Chapelle to honor the thorns and the fragment of the cross. This pleased him much and he said to Joinville:

"Seneschal, I am grieved in my heart that I shall be forced to quit such good and religious companions, to return among such a set of wretches as make up the court of Rome."

The Moslems offered to allow him to visit Jerusalem in safety, but he would not. He remembered Coeur de Lion's words, and repeated them—

"Since I can not deliver Jerusalem, I pray that I may never see the holy city."

Deliver Jerusalem he could not, for the Moslem armies rode at will around his skeleton of a force, and after several years of watching events, he was persuaded to return to France, to take the government again in his hands.

But the passage proved to be far from safe, as Joinville observed.

On the vigil of St. Mark, after Easter [he writes] the king and queen embarked on their ship and put to sea with a favorable wind. On the Saturday following we arrived off Cyprus. Near this island was a mountain in the sea called the Mountain of the Cross. On that day about vespers there came on such a thick fog from the land that our sailors thought themselves farther from the land than they were—for they had lost sight of this mountain.

It happened that as they tried eagerly to reach the shore, they struck on the end of a sandbank off the island. And fortunately it was so, for if we had not struck on this bank, we would have run against some dangerous half covered rocks. All of us thought that the vessel must be wrecked; but a sailor, casting the lead, found we were no longer aground.

When daylight came we saw the rocks on which we should have struck if it had not been for the sandbank. In the morning the king sent for the chief ship's captains, who mustered four divers—fellows who dive naked to the bottom of the sea, like fish. The captains ordered these divers to plunge into the sea, and they did so, passing under the ship.

When they came up, on the opposite side, we heard each ask the other what he had found. They all said that where our vessel had struck the sand, three fathoms of its keel had been broken off—which very much surprised the king and all who heard it. The king asked the mariners for their advice, and they replied:

"Sire, believe us, you must change from this ship to another. We know well that if the keel has suffered such damage, all the ribs of the ship must have started, and we very much fear she will be unable to bear the sea, should any wind arise."

The king, having listened to what the mariners said, summoned his council to decide what should be done, and they all agreed with the mariners. But the king called the captains to him again, and asked them, on the faith they owed him, whether if the ship were their own and full of merchandise they would quit it.

"Sire," they replied, "it would be needful to risk our lives, to safeguard such a cargo and vessel."

"Why, then," asked the king, "do you advise me to quit her?"

"Sire," they made response, "you and we are nowise the same. For there is no sum that would compensate for the loss of yourself and the queen and her three children."

"Now," said the king, "I will tell you what I think. If I quit the ship, there are five or six hundred persons who will do likewise out of fear, and they will remain on the island of Cyprus, losing hope of returning to their own land. I will rather put myself and the queen and the children under the good providence of God."

Yet after we were saved from this peril another befell us; for there arose so great a storm that in spite of all our efforts we were driven back toward the island long after we had left it. The seamen cast out four anchors in vain, and the vessel could not be stopped until they had thrown out the fifth, which held. All the partitions of the king's cabin had to be taken down, and so high was the wind that no one dared stay therein for fear of being blown overboard.

The queen came into the king's chamber, thinking to meet him there, but found only Sir Gilles le Brun, constable of France, and myself, who were lying down. She said she wanted the king, to beg that he might make some vows to God, that we would be delivered from this storm—for the sailors had told her we were in great danger of drowning.

"Madame," I replied, "do you vow to make a pilgrimage to my lord Saint Nicholas at Varengeville, that we may reach France in safety."

"Ah, Seneschal," answered she, "I am afraid the king would not let me make such a pilgrimage."

"At least then, Madame, promise the saint that if God brings you safely to France, you will give him a silver ship of the value of five marks. And for myself, I vow that I will make a pilgrimage to his shrine barefoot."

Upon this she vowed the silver ship, and demanded that I would be her pledge for the due performance of the vow, to which I assented. In a little while she came to us again to say that God, at the intercession of my lord Saint Nicholas, had delivered us from this peril . . .

At the end of ten weeks we arrived at the port of Hieres, to the great joy of the queen. She caused the ship to be made, as she had vowed, and put within it the effigies of the king, herself, and three children with the sailors all in silver, with ropes of silver thread. This ship she sent me with orders to carry it to the shrine of my lord Saint Nicholas, which I did . . .

* * *

In this way, as Joinville has described, ended the second Egyptian Crusade. The *beaux sabreurs* sought their homes in France, after casting the gage of their courage against the finer weapons and superior generalship of the Mamluks in vain.

And so in 1254 Saint Louis came back to his native land. He was so weakened by illness that more than once Joinville had to carry him from horse to chamber in his arms. But the saintly king bore himself in defeat with the same tranquillity with which he had set out in command of his armada six years before. He sought for no explanation of his overthrow. It had been God's will.*

* St. Louis made a second attempt nearly twenty years later, when he led a great Crusade against Tunis. He was drawn to this point by intrigue on the part of his old foe Baibars the Panther, who was then sultan of Egypt. A pest seized the army and St. Louis and his son Tristan were among the first to die of it. With the loss of the king the Crusade broke up—the last general Crusade to come out of Europe.

Its defeat left the Crusaders at bay upon the coast of the Holy Land, with the Templars and Hospitallers at the head of the defense there, and the Panther resolved to accomplish what Saladin had not been able to do—to drive them into the sea.

FALLEN MONARCH

By PAUL ANNIXTER

IN THE SALMON tinted dawn, near the stained rocks of last night's kill, Rama the elder lay washing like a cat. His great black maned head moved in ponderous circles above his paws, tongue lazily at work. He had drunk at a nearby waterhole and here in the spotted yellow grass in the growing light of day, he should have been content. Plainly Rama was not. Now and then his vast head jerked up and a low rumble tore its way out of the depths of him—a sound like water pouring through the holes of a great drain. Then he washed a bit more, or paused to test the warm, dry breeze that brought with it that alien, carnal taint from the direction of the kill.

It was that very breath in the wind that bothered him. It filmed his eyes and senses with thin red, just as certain trails on the veld had been wont to do, not wild life trails, or pack trails, but the single elongated marks of the upstanding enemy himself.

It was the unmistakable smell of the enemy that hung above those bones, a challenging, hateful presence that would not let him rest, that made him voice

menacing challenges to the dawn and the bush at large. For in the dark hours just preceding the dawn Rama had enacted the unspeakable thing—he had struck down a man on the trail.

It all happened within a moment, there in the blotted blackness of the thorn scrub. The faintest of faint rustles had whispered on the dust of the game trail just ahead, two shadows loomed, suddenly, unexpectedly, and Rama's vast bulk left the ground as if released by mighty springs. He had crunched once with bone breaking jaws, ripped, flung round and was away again in the same instant. There had been no time for thought; pure nerves had done the thing, the unreasoning reflex of surprise and fear.

If only the two natives had not come upon him so suddenly and taken him unawares, nothing would have happened. Or, having killed, if he had fled the dread spot as the other human had—through the dark of the bush. But the blood as it spouted forth was upon his shoulder just where he could lick it off. And Rama had tarried to lick it, and as the carmine stains wet his tongue and filled his nostrils, an awesome thrill, a grim, defiant horror settled upon him. Instinct had whispered even then the retribution that was in store. It might be swift and fearful, or lingering slow; but it was sure, as if written in the air and shadows of that place. For it is the first law of the wilderness that no beast shall spill the blood of man and live. The breaker of this law is hunted down and slain like any human murderer.

But mixed with Rama's awe was a strange, illicit excitement, a terrible sense of power. For all in a moment a terrible thing had dawned on him. He had found that not even the slim gazelle or the dapper zebra mares of the game plains died half so quickly or easily as man, the upright, two legged creature he had hitherto looked upon as invulnerable. And gradually he had accustomed himself to the inimical taint in the air; he had forgotten the terrible cry the man had made as he fell; and, approaching, he had fed on the kill, which completed his degradation. For the cat creature that has once eaten of human flesh becomes ridden with a different and insatiable hunger, a craving that is close to madness, which only death can abate.

HE WAS an old lion. It is ever an old lion that falls to man killing. He had seen great change. In his youth he had seen the red coats marching over the dun plains and heard the sound of far battles. He had seen the rapid spread of the Boer settlements over the southern veld. Some of these he had prowled through after they were deserted and fallen into empty shells and rubbish heaps, haunted by jackals. He had seen the black men march forth and war upon the whites and upon one another, for he was old. He was old as a lion might be.

For as many years as the wild folk of that region could remember, Rama had reigned ruthlessly over this particular section of the game plains—a region of hills and *dongas* and squat, spidery thorn trees, where white men rarely came and wild herds were in constant cross-country migration. Time was, and that time no more than two years past, when Rama had been a majestic and beautiful beast, six hundred pounds of sheer power, the ingrained strength of a young tooth in every separate fiber of him. He had been a great monarch in his day; any carnivore living to Rama's age has need to be.

Once his heart had known peace, softness, love hunger. But men had killed that. One of his mates had died in a trap. Another, his favorite, had fallen under the spears of the black men. Rama himself had outwitted all hunters, escaped the traps and spears of even the lion eating Masai warriors, who used magic and hunted in swift running *impis* as terrible as the wild dog packs. What Rama had not escaped was an inevitable old age, but this too he was resisting mightily, clinging to his power as an old king should, though his teeth were yellowing in his great slobbering mouth, and his pads were worn and

splayed and getting very hairy at the heel.

He was still king over all this region, but in tenure only, maintaining his rule by sheer bluster and a hangover prestige from the days of his mightiness. He still ruled and protected a younger mate, and bullied his band of bulky sons and sleek, sleepy eyed daughters into a docile belief in his perpetual almightiness.

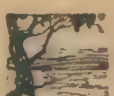
But now the thing that had long been pending had come to pass. Rama had been failing for a year or more in the suppleness and speed that were requisite for the wind swift hunting of wild game on the savannas. Some months before he had lost two teeth in the leg tendon of a fiddle faced old hartebeeste bull he had pulled down. That was his own grim secret. And on his chest he still bore the scars of an encounter with his last zebra stallion, a week before. Something to remember with rage and misgiving—the way his death leap had fallen short that night—the struggle he had had to put up for a throat hold on that valiant little beast, which his band had afterward placidly devoured, mildly surprised, no doubt, that the old sire had less appetite than usual.

The grim truth could no longer be denied; Rama's size and mighty strength were giving way by slow degrees to weight and years. His muscles were often stiff; his belly hung low and swung and he walked slowly, lumbering with head low. His best teeth had begun to splinter and his smoldering ocher eyes too often played him tricks at long range. But worst of all, with each stage of physical decay had come a moral one.

This very night he had resorted to treason to cover the fact. He had led forth his clan on a blind hunt at twilight, then slipped stealthily away like a thief in the night to visit a secret place he knew. The "attraction" had been the long deceased carcass of a rhinoceros killed by natives; in short, Rama had been about to degrade his majesty by feeding upon carrion when that unfortunate meeting with the natives on the game trail occurred. Result: Rama's fear of man, that invisible wall that is all that keeps the wild things at bay, makes them subordinate, had died. Thus all in an hour he had been transformed from a fairly respectable monarch, a killer of cattle and game, into one of the worst terrors of South Africa.

In the days that followed, Rama returned to power. Not the kingly power he had once known; but the dark, chaotic thrill of destruction. No longer did he view his kingdom through a golden haze of peace and serenity. Rama lived in a fog that never lifted now; a creature haunted, ignoble, exiled from the protection of natural law. He had reestablished himself on the strength of that new, vicious force, nor was there any going back in his rake's progress. For having once fallen to man killing he had forfeited both the taste and the inclination for the arduous game hunts on the savannas. The smell of the upstanding enemy which at first had brought him restless torture, now inflamed his senses with a terrible lust. He sought out the haunts of men, hung about their villages, and dreamed of man's soft flesh instead of young gazelle.

And, as his killing progressed, the sense of degradation which had undermined his self-respect during the first weeks was replaced by a villainous assurance.



AT FIRST he retained an active leadership of his band. But as the weeks passed and the old king hunted more and more alone, a break seemed imminent. The rages to which Rama had ever been subject and which were his prerogative as a monarch, now amounted to a madness at times. Even his own band were becoming wary of him now, for by the second month his history had begun to be written upon him. He began to look the part he played.

This new feeding of his seemed only to fill him with a more bottomless and insatiable hunger; he lost flesh and his once splendid coat became lusterless and patchy. His old wonderful litheness had entirely gone and with it the last of his majesty and beauty. One could no longer

see in him the regal creature who had won to the kingship of the district, whose yellow eyes had shone like sunlight in their brilliance. He had become in some subtle way a fearsome spectacle, a vampire, a Cain among beasts.

There came an evening when even his own family failed to answer his nightly summons, and stood back in a body, their black lips curled up over fit, white bone grinders that put Rama's splintered teeth to shame. The old king's head jerked up in astonishment and he roared again. But the young heads of his band also jerked and their eyes flamed defiance. Rama perceived himself suddenly alone, alienated from his following, and the canniness of all reverted things bade him accept matters as they stood. Thereafter he went his own ways after darkness fell.

Often enough his hunting was poor; often the night breeze carried the scent of lion toward the villages and keen nosed dogs gave warning so that Rama was forced to retreat. Sometimes days passed without his touching meat, but that made the bloodlust growing within him all the more terrible, for prolonged hunger in the cat tribe amounts to madness. He knew too much to confine his hunting to any one village. He had learned that a fierce and determined hunt followed each of his killings; the terrible Masai *impis*, a hundred or more men in a body, would go forth and beat back and forth across the veld, running in ever widening circles that meant death to any lion that lingered in the vicinity.

Therefore he traveled far from the scene of a kill, so that a week or more would pass with no sign of his presence. The black men with the rash carelessness which white men never know, would conclude that he was gone for good and relax their vigilance as before. But sooner or later some of these would pay for their foolish confidence with their lives.

But that caution of Rama's was only a wary wisdom. His boldness was steadily increasing. He had become an ill tempered, savage old criminal, whose reactions were not to be predicted. He had found out that just as a doe is easier to kill than a horned buck, certain of this new kind of game were more easily taken than others. Sometimes children going forth for the cattle were to be waylaid; sometimes a woman or an old man too weak to wield a spear. And there were always the dogs.

As the months passed he gradually broke off even the little contact he had had with his former band, and became a complete solitary. His spirit grew more and more restless and he seldom stayed more than twenty-four hours in any one locality. In his lone wanderings he ventured upon the territory of neighboring kings, and one night came face to face with another old one like himself—a fierce, lonely, decrepit beast, bristling with mock lordliness as Rama approached.

There on the whitish plain stood the two old ones—mangy, outlawed and down-at-the-heel, the very fires of their belligerence overshadowed by futility. Of the two Rama had been the wiser and more courageous leader and, in falling, had consequently sunk the deeper into depravity. In this other old one he recognized a subject, one who might follow him on his downward way, and roaring a challenge he fell upon the other and gave him a violent whipping. At the end, slashed, gouged, torn and mauled, the stranger lay upon his side, head low in submission.

Thereafter these two hunted together. Rama versed his subject in the deeper ways of evil, overcoming the last of his natural aversion to the man hunt. Together on moonless nights when black men were barricaded in their huts, they would creep about the villages, their eyes like pale moons in the darkness. They would circle and recircle the cattle *kraals* and the round thatched huts, leaving their huge pad marks, broader than a spread hand, in the sandy crust with as much impunity as they had formerly crossed the open veld.

The presence of each lent stomach to the other; the fear smell emanating from the natives within the silent huts mad-

dened their depraved senses. Their low and terrible purrings, as if they were humming hoarsely to themselves in the dark, were terrible to hear; and their blood curdling roars as they answered each other from different spots were reflected from the surface of the plain with that ventriloquial quality peculiar to lion calls, until the quailing natives more often than not believed that a troop of lions was attacking the village.

SOON men came to know both lions by sight. In every village of the region some few eyes had seen them by day slinking through the grass or *dongas*, and recognized them for the scourges they were. Rama was still the largest lion those parts had known for many a decade, more than nine feet six inches long, and the fact gave rein to the ever rampant imagination of the blacks. Rumor soon had it that there were many lions among the man eaters, and that they were led by a giant male big as a water buffalo, and fiery eyed. Reports soon reached the ears of white men more than a hundred miles to the south and the British government set a price on Rama's head.

Low as he had fallen, however, Rama had lost none of that sagacity which had made him a great monarch. In many ways, in fact, his wile was heightened by his warfare and proximity with humans. It proved useless to attempt to hunt him; he had learned the ways of men too well. Sometimes natives poisoned a carcass or sowed the trails with traps. It was of no use. Rama and his confederate trod beside the trails, never in the regular wild life runways.

Not a few English sportsmen, intrigued by the tales they heard, went forth with native beaters to try for him. Sometimes one of these would spend the night in some tree where a visit from the lions was expected. But Rama never came on such occasions; he could gage the unnatural feel in the air that indicated the still-hunt to a nicety. In short, he was still a great and extraordinary general, but a general of the banned and outlawed. The craft of the weak was in his leadership now, instead of the crushing force and swift offensive of his prime.

But there came in time one hunter, a young army officer, who profited by the errors of others. Knowing that the average man killer has no permanent lair and wanders by day as well as by might, he took up his station on a high *kloof* that overlooked a wide stretch of country near the Kikuyu village which had suffered most from Rama's depredations. Throughout two days he raked the country constantly with a pair of powerful field glasses and, on the second afternoon, his vigil was rewarded. Afar he sighted Rama and the other old one crossing a rise of ground. Working his cautious way along a *donga*, he finally got within fair rifle range. Rama's companion collapsed without a kick, never knew what hit him as the .303 expanding bullet caught him just behind the shoulder, smashing his spine.

Thereafter Rama trod the downward path alone except, of course, for his followers. These were the scavengers of the plains—certain black-back jackals and spotted hyenas—loose, thirsty characters and professional cadgers, all of them defiled and maudlin, who for months had followed close in the wake of all his wanderings.

Whenever a kill was made the skulking circle would gather close—small, snapping jaws and sloping spines, the hyenas with their vicious, hypocritical smirk, the black-backs with their clever tolerations, the diplomacy of the craven in their cunning, sidelong glances. All one to these grave robbers what the kill and how procured, so long as they got theirs. Even by day as Rama slept in some airless inferno amid the papyrus swamps, these shadow beasts seldom withdrew for long.

The reasons for this were twofold. Every lion has a hanger-on or two, mere occasional trailers, who follow the veld king on his hunts and share, when fortune favors, the meaner portions of the kill. But when a lion nears his allotted span of

life, the hungry crew increases; the partnership becomes less and less limited; day or night they never leave him, for they are the "executors of the wild", and none know better than they that his days are numbered. Any day or any hour their patron may become their table fare by lying down for his last long sleep; so closer and closer they hang as his vital flame burns low, these loathsome watchers of the dying, for they must be vigilant to cheat the vulture and the asvogel, who see all things from on high.

Rama knew these signs. Long had he plotted against the crew of eleven unbidden guests who fed at his table, and forever shuffled at his heels, knowing them to be the forerunners of death. Often when he knew they slept full fed, he had slunk away and journeyed many miles at his swinging travel rack, hoping to elude them; but always they found him out again. When he killed he was loath to leave even a remnant for the pack, crouching over the remains, a true dog in the manger, until the feverish inner thirst which never left him now, drove him off to seek some muddy pool. Instantly the carcass would be covered with a struggling, quarreling mass as the undertakers fleshed their yellowed fangs.

But though Rama's dreams were filled with guns and hunters and the lowly, nagging pack; though he took to sleeping in dense scrub protected by thickets of six-inch thorns as his powers waned, he was not to die through these. True, the stage was already set for it; nothing but a miracle could avert that ignominious finish. But there came a day as there often does, in fact as well as fiction, when that miracle happened.

AS THE SOFT purple of its dawn changed to the hot yellow of the African morning, it found Rama lying upon a flat rock watching the distant plains come into view as was his habit, licking, off and on, his stone bruised paws. In the mimosa scrub below, his attendant ghouls, increased to fourteen now, made the morning noxious with obscene coughings and whinings. Their hunched forms were sprawled here and there amid the shadows, some of them weaving in and out in restless, intricate patterns that matched their craven minds, growling and snapping at each other in passing. They had fared ill the past few days and their tempers were at hair trigger. For some thirty hours no meat had passed Rama's lips. He was weak and fevered, and hourly the chances of his making a kill grew slimmer. Another twenty-four hours and even the effort of stalking the prey would be too much for him, and he would sink down in his tracks. Then the swift and gruesome finish at the hands of the grisly speckled crew below.

It was at this crucial point that something slipped behind the scenes of things, and the awaited dénouement was given the double twist as so often happens in the wild. From over the top of a rolling hill as Rama watched there came a sudden, nervous flight of gnu, gazelle and zebra. They passed within a hundred yards of Rama's rock, heading toward the north, and running with an air of uncertainty, quite unlike their usual, whole hearted flights. Quite evidently they were galvanized by an overpowering fear. It showed in the whites of their rolling eyes.

Rama lay watching them with the hypnosis of the starving. Below him his followers were stirring uneasily. Vague terror seemed running down the wind, making itself evident throughout all the world of grass and thicket. Presently another headlong flight including antelope, gazelle and hartebeeste followed in the wake of the first. Their terror was imparted to the hyenas and black-backs and these likewise began melting away in the thickets.

Rama himself was slow to get the feel, but presently it came to him down the wind in a manner not to be mistaken. From afar across the plains there sounded a sudden cry that chilled the blood streams. It was the hunting cry of the African wild dogs. Only once before—in

Rama's youth—had he heard that cry, a year when famine had ravaged the land and the terrible wild horde of the southern velds had swept northward, killing as they came. Tall and heavy as the American wolf, the wild dog is the scourge of the southern plains. Nothing that ranges the broad savannas will stand before a full pack of these killers; the residential monarchs such as the lion and the cheetah dread the coming of this hundred-footed death as much as do the browsers both feed upon.

With the first far *hooo-ah* of the pack every other four footed thing in all the region had started on a rapid march for distant parts. Rama, however, remained for some time upon his rock, too thankful to be rid of his followers for a time to think of flight himself. But as the shuddering cry broke out a second time, startlingly loud and close, he dropped to the ground and went slouching down a wooded *donga*, expecting the pack would pass on. Two minutes later, however, the running band of nearly thirty ochre-yellow hunting dogs had come upon his fresh trail and were quartering the ravine in his wake. Rama saw them swarming through the thickets, their shrill, yelping cries carrying a strange, insensate menace. In a moment they were surrounding him, the hair on their heavy necks bristling as they threatened him with vicious snarls.

Wrath boiled up in Rama and he rushed them, forgetful of his weakness. The front ranks dissolved, but from behind a dog leaped out of cover and snapped at his haunches. With a salvo of coughing roars Rama pivoted just in time to protect his haunches, then flung himself fiercely here and there at every cluster of the elusive enemies in turn, to no avail. The agile pack melted like magic before him and his blind rushes brought him headlong into sharp thorned bushes. Furious, he kept it up until at last, bewildered and heaving, he stood in an open spot entirely ringed round by the foe. His rage had done no more than seal his fate. Had he remained quietly upon his rock, the pack might soon have passed on, but once their offensive is turned toward the death of any creature, they will achieve their end without fail, for a deathless persistence is the keynote—the most deep rooted instinct—in the wild dog's brain.

THEY might have rushed him then with impunity and pulled him down but, ever wily and circuitous, none wished to risk too quickly a direct encounter with so huge and formidable an antagonist. So they continued to circle round him, making feigned rushes, leading him into useless charges, as is the wild dog's way. These maddening tactics soon became unbearable and, infuriated, filled with shame, Rama turned and fled away along the *donga*. But the pack still followed, or rather, accompanied him, ringing him round, while every now and then one dog, more daring than the rest, sprang in and slashed at his haunches.

Had Rama known the breed better he would have felt much more than outrage as he lumbered down the *donga;* he would have read at once the inevitable finish that lay ahead. As it was, he momentarily expected the pack to take themselves away and let him alone. Not until far on into the afternoon, after seven tortuous hours of nagging flight, did he realize that actual doom was dogging his footsteps. It was then, as he crouched, hot, winded and footsore beneath a bush, watched by the steady, deadly glare of thirty killers, that fear for the first time entered his heart.

But that was only the beginning of an epic chase. Throughout that fleeting day and the whole of the night that followed, it continued. Sometimes at a lurching gallop, sometimes at a rolling, lumbering slouch, Rama fled before them without rest, while the pack, like the Furies, ran beside, behind and around him, giving him no pause, no sleep, scarcely a moment's respite in which to lap a mouthful of tepid water from some muddy pool.

By now his flanks and sides were red

and seared from repeated slashes, where razor-like teeth had found a chance to rip and retreat. The pace was becoming terrible; Rama was already drunk with exhaustion, his broad pads bleeding from stone bruises.

From time to time he staggered blindly, carelessly, rallying only in time to save himself from being hamstrung. The moon came up and lighted him on his way, as he drove blindly through choking thorn scrub and down along rocky, winding stream beds, never stopping, marking out the trail with blood. The pack could rest in turn, could even sleep, but Rama had no surcease. Until finally another burning sun arose, and the heat from sky and earth combined and dizzied him anew.

And that was the end. Coughing, foaming at the mouth, Rama reeled on blindly, directionless, his strength gone, almost falling. He could do no more. But no, he could at that—one more thing. Through bloodshot eyes, through the gathering fog of death and darkness, he saw it—did it.

The place he had come to was a low and level stretch of grass jungle, dotted sparsely with trees, intersected by small streamlets from the hills that trickled deep among green reeds. Except upon the higher knolls the feet sank deep in clinging mud. And here, in his extremity, at the end of all his trails, Rama had recognized an old familiar spot where through the years he had seen many and many an animal sinking to its death in bottomless morass.

And, answering that universal instinct every creature feels, to lie inviolate at the last, he had rallied himself for a final spurt and spring—and had leaped, literally wrenching himself out of the jaws of the closing pack. Where he fell the reeds and blackish water closed about him, leaving not a sign. Even wild dogs could not follow there.

LINES TO AN OLD ROMAN EMPEROR

By HARRY KEMP

Yours was no honor to put off or on:
The legions chose: you either ruled or died;
The lives of men were dice that lost or won;
Imperial Purple was no winsome bride—
She was a terrible dominance, a power
Who laureled you a god, her pitiless hour.
Oh, a brave soul was yours, to dare and don
That sleepless envy of imperial pride.

With hungry daggers creeping through the dark,
Your world a sport for captains, striving who
Should wed the dreaded Purple after you—
You dared the apex for all hate to mark,
You bore the courage for the topmost seat
While kingdoms broke in blood about your feet!

Continuing

TRAITOR'S BANE

A Novel of the South Seas

By BASIL CAREY

THE COURT on Amanu found Manisty guilty of the murder of old man Moreau on the little tropic island of Kilea, and sentenced him to be hanged. And that brought the feud, that had been burning near the surface between the *Flying Spaniard* and the *Peregrine* for months, to a flaring blaze.

Torquil and Callaghan and Blaise, of the *Peregrine*, knew their shipmate Manisty had been framed by Scarlett and Ruthven, of the *Spaniard*. Scarlett testified in court that one of his Kanakas had seen Manisty cleaning a blood stained knife down the beach from old Moreau's; and it was in vain that Manisty cried out in terror that he hadn't killed old Moreau, nor did he know what it was the secretive old man kept in his iron box that was found plundered.

Torquil had arisen in court and had shaken his great fist at Scarlett.

"You lying rat—Manisty's going to swing for a killing of yours, and I'll get you for it, so help me God!"

There wasn't any doubt in Torquil's mind that Scarlett and Ruthven had whatever it was old man Moreau had

guarded so jealously in his iron box for years. And there wasn't any doubt in Scarlett's mind that Torquil meant what he said.

"We've got to slip away before the hanging," Scarlett told Ruthven. "The *Peregrine* will wait until after the execution, and we've got to get the jump on her. That devil Torquil . . ."

But Torquil anticipated that, and he and Callaghan and Blaise, the youngster, stood watch on the *Spaniard*, ready to up anchor in pursuit the moment she hoisted a sail.

Young Blaise was the weakest link in their chain of hate. He was loyal to his mates, but somehow he couldn't find it in him to hate Gillian, Ruthven's beautiful sister, who was aboard the *Spaniard* with her brother. Torquil warned him against her.

"She's as beautiful and as false as sin—and she'd take your heart and break it, and laugh. Women—rotten, the lot of them!"

But Blaise was not to be warned; he and Gillian struck up a friendship. The girl welcomed his company after weeks alone with her moody giant of a brother, and the strange Scarlett, whose hot eyes rarely left her.

Scarlett, casting desperately about for some means to slip the watch the *Peregrine* kept over him, learned of the friendship—and turned it to his own use. He bullied a confession out of Gillian that she was to meet Blaise on a point of land from which the *Spaniard* could not be seen. And, knowing that the boy would wait all night for Gillian if necessary, he kept the girl aboard. At midnight, muffled by sacks, the anchor of the *Flying Spaniard* was hoisted . . .

For a day and a half after Manisty was hanged, the *Peregrine* beat about, speaking various ships for news of the *Spaniard*. Then one evening Torquil spoke a steamer that had sighted the *Spaniard*, heading southwest. Across the chart Callaghan looked at Torquil. Southwest. That could mean but one place—the Island of Tungas, where no questions were asked, no matter what it was one had to sell. And to make up for lost time, the *Peregrine* would have to risk the dangerous passage through the Hombergs—a graveyard for ships.

Just before the *Peregrine* entered the passage, the whole ship's company on edge, Torquil set upon Blaise, who, dumb with the thought that he had let Manisty's enemies escape, went about in a daze.

"Snap out of it, you fool. You were asleep—"

Blaise's eyes took on a hunted look, and Torquil caught it. He came close.

"Like hell you were asleep!" he said. "I'll bet there's a woman in this!"

HIS HANDS fastened on Blaise's shoulders.

"Were you sleeping? And where were you? Tell me."

Blaise tried to wrench himself free. "Let me go."

"It's true, then. You let us down for some woman."

"No, no!"

"I say yes. Don't lie about it, you swine."

"I'm not lying. This is a put-up job. You and Callaghan—"

"Shut up."

"It's Callaghan. He hates me. He's put you up to this—"

"Be quiet, you fool. I'm right, then. You were with some girl."

"I wasn't. I swear it."

On Blaise's forehead there were little beads of sweat.

"Who was it? A Kanaka girl? Madison's daughter? That girl up at Stanley White's?"

A thought formed suddenly in Torquil's mind. He dismissed it, but it returned, fierce, insistent. He looked at the white face before him. Under his hands he could feel Blaise's shoulders bracing for an effort. The haunted look in the boy's eyes went to his heart. But he knew, now.

"Was it Ruthven's sister?"

He felt Blaise's muscles slacken, and knew he had hit on the truth. Yes.

They might have guessed it, he and Callaghan between them.

"You loved her," he said tonelessly. "You were with her instead of being at your post."

He released his grip and Blaise sagged back against the table.

"She didn't come. She never loved me. We were going to say goodby—but she never came."

His voice trailed into silence. Torquil felt a swift pity, but the next moment it was swallowed up in anger—furious anger that turned into hatred. Not for Blaise. The old comradeship was ended, true. They would never go back to the old friendly days. As long as they lived the shadow of this treachery would lie between them. But his hatred was not for Blaise. It was for the woman.

CHAPTER V

THROUGH THE HOMBERGS

THERE came a morning of blue and gold when the *Flying Spaniard* turned northwest and began beating up toward Tungas. Scarlett reckoned that it would be a six days' job, providing the wind held. After a week at sea, tempers were short. Ruthven contradicted him sharply.

"Make it seven, and you'll give us short measure, then."

Scarlett did not answer. They were at breakfast, and Gillian had not appeared.

"Where's Gillian?" said Ruthven, presently. "She's been very queer these past two days. I hope she's not sick."

"She's all right," said Scarlett.

"Scarlett," Ruthven said, "Gillian's my sister and she's *tabu*, see? I know what you are with women, but you're not getting away with anything this trip."

"Let us all pray," said Scarlett. "There will be tea and buns in the schoolroom as soon as the curate's finished his address."

Ruthven flushed and his great hands clinched.

"One of these days, Scarlett—" He broke off at a cry from above.

Scarlett jumped to his feet and went on deck. He found Pau Tiau gesticulating and babbling excitedly. He struck the Kanaka cruelly across the mouth with his open hand, and the blow had the effect of calming the native somewhat. Enough, anyway, to say—

"Him cook boy say one fella rat in water."

"What!" Scarlett yelled. "Send him here. Go fetchem all same quick!"

Pau Tiau fled. Scarlett heard him yelling down the forescuttle. Ruthven's flaming head appeared in the companion.

"What's the row?"

"Pau Tiau says there's a rat in the cask."

"The hell he does!"

"It's Natui's fault," said Scarlett. "Wait till I get hold of him."

They waited grimly till muffled shrieks announced that Natui was being hauled on deck.

"Come here!" Scarlett roared at him. "Ruthven, go and see if it's true. You, Natui, you come all same close. Savvy?"

Natui crumpled up on deck, sobbing.

"Oh, Sekeleti, him rat—"

"You all same cook boy. You savvy must look in water one, two time every day. You not look?"

"All same look, Sekeleti, one, two time every day."

"Liar," said Scarlett.

If there was a dead rat in one of the butts Natui had obviously neglected his job of inspecting them twice daily. He waited while the Kanaka sobbed protestations and explanations, writhing on the planks like a frightened dog.

"God, it's a rat all right," said Ruthven, coming back. "The third cask. The second's pretty well finished. I suppose he was going to start the last one today. I should think the brute's been there a week. Phew!"

"No, no," Natui screamed.

Scarlett began unbuckling his belt. At the sight the wretched Natui gave a piercing yell.

Ruthven jerked him to his feet and handed him over to Scarlett. There was a whistling sound as the leather slashed through the air. Again and again it rose and fell, drawing blood now that discolored the deck. Natui screamed himself hoarse. He could not escape from the iron hand that held him. As the leather cut into the bare flesh, he grew suddenly limp. When Scarlett flung him away he lay still where he had fallen. The other boys, clustered together by the forescuttle, made no movement to help him. Nor would they lift a finger until Scarlett gave them leave.

"You fella Kanaka takem Natui," said Scarlett at last, and they moved forward to lift the limp body. Gillian, coming on deck, saw them carrying it away.

"What's the matter?" she asked Ruthven. "Is Natui hurt?"

"I hope so," said Scarlett, before Ruthven could speak. His sallow face was livid. His belt still swung in his hand. "Do you know what the damn fool's done? He's not looked at the butts for days. This morning he goes to the third cask and finds a dead rat. Been there a week most likely. Stinking like poison."

"And the second barrel's almost empty," Ruthven told her gloomily. "Damned unlucky."

Scarlett was wiping his belt before he put it on.

"He'll be sorry he was born before I've done with him," he said. "It'll mean putting ashore for water. And every hour's—"

He stopped.

"Every hour's precious," Gillian finished for him. "Is that what you were going to say? Really, I can't understand why. Why all the hurry to get to Tungas? I thought the whole idea of getting away was to be out of Torquil's reach. Well, we're out of his reach all right. Even supposing he's following us, we're well ahead. Why are you in such terrible haste to get to this place?"

"Business," said Ruthven unwisely.

"What business?"

"Something you wouldn't understand." Ruthven tried clumsily to cover his mistake. "About a—er—a load of copra that must be taken off by the sixth."

"And what is there I can't understand about that?" demanded Gillian. "There's something you're hiding from me."

Ruthven laughed uneasily.

"Nonsense. What could there be?"

"Quite a lot of things," Gillian told him, turning on her heel.

Ruthven looked after the tall figure gloomily.

"Hell," he said. "Of all the priceless fools I've met—" Scarlett said angrily. "You damned idiot, what made you say that about copra? The whole thing's ticklish enough without you putting your clumsy hoof in. You've got her suspicious, now. Here, Pau Tiau, you go *kai-kai*—eat—now."

Ruthven sloped away with an injured air. Under Scarlett's hands the *Flying Spaniard* moved like a live thing. The wind hummed in the cordage. Up aloft the lookout boy was singing. His husky voice was borne up by the wind beyond the topmast shrouds. The white horses were out, shaking their manes as they galloped alongside the ship. A smear of smoke on the horizon showed where some tramp was lazing down to Auckland, with a hold full of copra and pearl shell.

Scarlett decided that they would put in at Moselle for water. It would mean delay, but that was better than going short for six days. He knew the dangers of trying to live on half a mug of water a day. When he spoke to Ruthven the latter agreed.

"Moselle's miles out of our way. But we'd better do it. We ought to make it some time tomorrow afternoon."

The noonday sun went slowly westward. The hot color of sea and sky paled and faded, then deepened as if some one had drawn a brush full of wet paint across a picture. Just at sunset an albatross went by, breasting the air like a spirit. They watched it out of sight, lost in the wonder that strikes new and fresh every time at sight of the power and beauty of

these birds. Across the sea the last rays of the sun lay like blood. A sharp sweetness was in the wind.

Ruthven was at the helm. The boys were below, busy with the evening meal. Scarlett, sauntering on deck, marked where Gillian stood staring into the heart of the sunset. He went and stood beside her, noiselessly, so that she started at the sound of his voice.

"Are you cold?" he asked. "That dress isn't very thick."

"Yes," said Gillian, quickly. "I'm going below."

But even as she turned he caught her wrist.

"What's the hurry? I want to talk to you."

"I don't want to listen." She wrenched herself free. "I don't want to listen to you," she repeated, her eyes blazing. "I dislike you. More than that, I despise you. The only word I ever want to hear from you is goodby."

He stepped back. A wave of anger swept over him. Slow, deadly rage against her woke in his heart. The passion of desire that she had aroused in him was swallowed up in the bitter antagonism which her words had caused.

He stood still after she had gone hurrying through the dusk to the shelter of the cabin.

Presently he stirred like a man waking, and looked about him. It was dark now. Above him the dark sky, below him the dark sea—and in his heart a dark tide of hatred that swelled and swelled till the vivid, passionate thing that had been his love for Gillian Ruthven was as though it had never been.

II

THE *PEREGRINE* went sweeping down through the Hombergs. Callaghan was at the wheel. He had a two days' beard on his face and his eyes were red rimmed. But he refused to move except for snatched half-hours, when he rolled down the companion and slept where he fell. Torquil and Blaise obeyed his least word. The lives of all of them—the life of the ship herself—lay in those horny hands.

The boys went about their work with tight lips and anxious eyes. Like dogs, they knew that their masters were troubled. They had confidence in Torquil and in Callaghan, but merely tolerated Blaise—regarding him as a fool, a young one, a man not yet blooded. There was no chattering at night now, no friendly wrangles over tidbits in the galley. Over the whole ship lay an air of strain.

On the chart the passage through the Hombergs was marked doubtful. But Callaghan, casting back over the years, made variations with a stubby pencil. The voyage through the group which the *Duchess* had accomplished had been stamped in his mind as the most terrible experience he had ever known. As he marked the chart he had a vision of McCarthy marking a similar chart thirty years ago—old Sandy McCarthy who was still alive in Tungas—old McCarthy with his wispy beard and his spare humped figure.

The wind veered. It began to blow from the northeast, so that the *Peregrine* must tack and twist lest she be driven too far south, like a hawk blown down the wind. Callaghan feared the sweep of the South Current, which they must cross halfway through the group. This deadly sea river, rolling on relentlessly as Time itself, might well bring them to disaster. Compressed and narrowed among the islands it ran with the added swiftness and fury that repression brings in its train. The South Current in open sea was a thing to be dreaded. But the South Current swirling down between the reef locked islands was a danger that haunted the very dreams of those who must face it.

Blaise's eyes were losing their youth. There were little bitter lines about the curve of his mouth. Between the three men danger had made truce. But antagonism only bided its time. When peril should be past, the lurking hostility between Blaise and Callaghan would no longer be hidden. Even now the elder

man eyed the younger threateningly, watching him, marking his sullen ways, his aloofness. Torquil would not discuss the matter. But he knew that Gillian was slowly building a wall between himself and Blaise.

The wind held fast to the northeast. Low lying islands went by in the noontide heat—dim green jewels in this studded belt of Death. Towards three o'clock Torquil sighted a derelict on the starboard bow. She was nothing but a hulk, mastless, water logged, desolate. Her name might still be read.

"*Jocelyn*," said Blaise, as they watched her. "Why, that was Henry Davis."

There was a silence.

"So that's what happened to Henry," commented Callaghan. "He ain't been heard of these nine months."

They passed her, but the thought of the dead ship remained to haunt them. Callaghan's mouth was set in a grim line.

"Wind's risin'," he said presently. "Gawd, I hope it don't get up more than—"

He stopped abruptly. The wind and the hidden reefs—which of them would get the *Peregrine*? Already he could tell by the sway of the ship that they were near the South Current. Just at sunset they entered it.

A faint zig-zag line stretched across their path. The edge of the current could be plainly seen as it swept down, keeping to its track as though it ran between stone walls. There was something different about the water of this river of the sea—a dark, smooth look. Callaghan cursed prayerfully as they crossed the line. The *Peregrine* hesitated as she slid in—hesitated, bucked, and began to race. The sun went down and in thirteen minutes it was dark.

THE PULL of the tide never slackened. No one shut an eye that night. The rising wind was a constant menace. The *Peregrine* struggled on gamely, lurching forward into the unknown under a starless sky. Blaise and Torquil, tussling with the mainsail, felt the water swirling round their ankles as the waves broke over the deck. A jag of lightning spat across the sky. Above the screaming of the wind in the shrouds they heard the growl of thunder. One of the boys yelled and Torquil reached out and struck him across the mouth. He knew the danger of sudden panic among the Kanakas. The fellow shut his bruised lips and made a blind rush. Torquil laid him out flat, and his comrades groped their way to him and propped him dangerously in the lee of the deck house.

The waves swept over the decks till Callaghan shouted for a rope. It was Torquil who brought it, staggering through the water that poured into the lee scuppers like a flood. Round Callaghan's sodden body he passed the rope, binding him fast to the ship from which the greedy sea tried to drag him. By the lightning's glare they peered into each other's faces—faces that were white and set as those of drowned men. Callaghan's body was going numb, but he refused to give up his place to Torquil.

But it was the wind that sent them nearest to defeat. It was veering toward the north, creeping round with a slow, unmistakable change. Callaghan was sweating. If the *Peregrine* were blown out of her course to the south, Lord knew where she might get. Desperately he strove to make westing, but the ship warned him that he was playing a dangerous game. He wiped his wet face with a wet hand and stared ahead into the darkness.

There came a sudden lull, a sinister pause. A flash lighted up the close reefed topsail, the reefed foresail, the figures of Blaise and two Kanakas clinging to the mast as a wave broke over the side.

"Look out!" shouted Torquil, at Callaghan's elbow. "Keep straight ahead, you fool. What the hell are you doing?"

"There's time," Callaghan said hoarsely.

He was swinging her round, trying to put her up into the wind in this moment of calm. If he could put her about he

would have a chance of stopping her headlong career southward. It had been hopeless to try before.

"There's time," he said.

But there was not. Before he could complete the turn the wind struck. The *Peregrine* heeled, swinging over to port with a sickening lurch. Every man clutched for life at the thing that was nearest. Torquil shouted, but he could not hear his own voice in the cannonade of weather. The deck slid away under his feet and he found himself grasping Callaghan's ankles in a desperate effort to save himself. Where was Blaise? The lives of all of them were in the balance. but it was not his own safety, or Callaghan, or the ship that sprang to his mind. Blaise! Traitor, liar, trickster he might be—

"Blaise!"

But the wind snatched the name and tore it away. Callaghan wrestled with all his strength to save the ship. Gasping, half drowned, with the wet ropes sawing into his body, he held fast, coaxing, urging, bullying. Slowly the ship staggered up, shaking herself like a dog. By degrees he worked her round into the wind. He was quite unaware that he was singing —bawling out some ribald catch at the top of his voice. The *Peregrine* wasn't done yet. No, by God, she was still afloat. With luck she'd ride the storm out—yes, ride it out, damn her. He shouted for Torquil, but Torquil was not there.

He was searching for Blaise. With wet, grasping hands he felt his way amidships, with the rushing water about his thighs. His voice was lost in his throat, strangled by fear. A wave broke over the bows and sent a wall of water to meet him. When he came to himself he was lying jammed against the taffrail. Some one was singing. It was Callaghan. Torquil got up, stupid, dazed, coughing, and blundered forward again.

Was there any hope that Blaise was alive? The ship was riding the storm. Somehow he knew that she would live. His voice came back, weak and unsteady, and he shouted Blaise's name till he was hoarse. Passing the deckhouse, he tripped over something and fell headlong. It was Blaise's body. Somehow he lifted him, dragging the limp form to the deckhouse door. He wrenched it open and hauled Blaise into safety. With unsteady hands he found matches and lighted the lantern. The smoky glare showed him a white faced Blaise, with a cut cheek and two dull red marks on his forehead. He took the limp hands and rubbed them roughly. He mustn't stay. He must get back to the aid of the storm swept ship. But first he must know whether the *Peregrine* carried a dead man.

After agonized moments Blaise opened his eyes. He stared at Torquil without any understanding whatever. Presently he shivered, his eyes clouding as memory rushed back. Torquil felt the quickening hands grasp his own. Blaise leaned forward as if to speak. Brown eyes and gray met. In that moment they might have looked into each other's hearts. But between them, like a bright sword, stood Gillian, so that they saw, not each other, but the woman, in whom their love and hatred met.

Without a word Torquil went back into the storm, shutting the door fast behind him.

CHAPTER VI

THE EMERALD SNAKE

THE *FLYING SPANIARD* came mincing up from the south toward Moselle.

Moselle is a queer place. It is of volcanic origin, rising out of the sea with the bewildered look of not being quite sure of itself. There is about it the same indefinable uneasiness that shadows Easter Island, and Pitcairn and Tungas. It has the air of having been the scene of some stupendous unheaval, some tremendous happening, whose dust has only just settled. It is mysterious, with the mystery of old centuries lurking in the sun warmed rocks. Good springs are to

be found near the shore, and there is a fine natural harbor on the southwest, and a possible landing place on the north. Being a good way out of the trade routes it has few callers. No white men live there. Hidden away somewhere in its twenty-four square miles is a native village in which dwell a race of tall, extremely warlike people with long, narrow heads—produced by massage in infancy—and pointed ears like fauns. Their food consists of fish, taro, yam, and occasionally a friend. For some obscure reason white men are regarded as *tabu* and consequently unedible.

Under a blistering sun Ruthven drove the ship steadily north. They should make Moselle by next morning. He would be glad when this voyage was over and they were all safe in Tungas. Ah, the whole affair had been risky. Sometimes he wished himself well out of it. Then he remembered the thing for which he and Scarlett had dared their safety, and he knew that he would see it through to the end.

Scarlett puzzled him. His wits, not over-sharp, could not make out the other's attitude toward Gillian. She herself, superbly aloof, gave him no help. There was no mistake about her feeling for Scarlett. Quite frankly and obviously she hated him.

Scarlett had relapsed into a savage ill humor. He ate little and spoke only when he must. He ignored Gillian. The two of them set Ruthven's nerves on edge. Here was something hidden, something of which he had no knowledge. It irked him to see the sullen constraint that they showed in each other's presence. It was impossible to tackle Scarlett. But perhaps Gillian might be made to speak. Ruthven watched for an opportunity. It came when they were at their noon meal. Scarlett was on deck. He had taken over from Ruthven without a word, his black eyes already scanning the blue horizon.

Ruthven pushed his empty plate aside with a clatter and leaned toward his sister.

"Gillian."

"Yes?"

"You're very quiet these days. What is it?"

"Nothing."

"You can't kid me. You and Scarlett used to be friendly. Now you're like a couple of icebergs. What's he done?"

Gillian went crimson.

"He asked me to marry him."

Ruthven sat back in blank astonishment.

"Did he?"

"Yes. Ives, when we're through with this business that's taking you to Tungas, can't we get away from him?"

"Get away from him?" repeated Ruthven slowly. "My God, don't you know I'd have left him years ago if I could?"

"Then why—"

He stood up, his blue eyes staring past her at something she could not see.

"Some people stay together because they love, and some because they hate, and some because they must. He and I—we've been in too many tight corners together. We've shared too many dangers. We're enemies and yet we don't part. Why? Hell, I can't explain. But I'll tell you this—" he pushed the hair from his forehead with an unsteady hand. "Two years ago we put into Amanu and I left him. I swore I'd done with him and I'd never see his face again. I told him so and he said nothing—let me go without a word. I got my gear together and quit the *Flying Spaniard*—went ashore to find a new ship. There were a tidy few boats in port, and I thought I'd have an easy job to choose."

"And whom did you choose?"

He laughed bitterly.

"No one. I couldn't. I went back."

"Went back?"

"He was on deck, just where I'd left him in the morning. He saw me come aboard, but he never said a word. I wanted to smash his face in."

He began to walk restlessly up and down the narrow space.

"Well, that's how it is. We've never mentioned the thing at all. But can't you

see that it's no use to talk about getting away?"

"Yes," she insisted. "Ives, we must."

He turned on her fiercely.

"I tell you no. I can't. You don't understand. Women don't, I suppose. It seems crazy to you that I stick to a man like Scarlett. Most likely one of us will kill the other some day."

SHE DREW back a little. This was a different Ives from the brother she had known. His white, troubled face, his haunted eyes, stirred her to the heart. What spell was this that Scarlett could weave? What magic lay in the man that he could bind Ruthven, unwilling, reluctant, with chains that could not be broken? Ruthven flung out of the cabin and went on deck. Gillian, left alone, sat down on the stool from which she had risen in the heat of the argument. When Natui came in to clear the dishes she waved him away. He padded out again, perturbed by her frown.

Sitting there as the ship raced on toward Moselle, she tried to thresh the thing out. What lurked behind all this speed, this secrecy? Why were they hurrying to Tungas, that island with the black name? The distrust which she had felt at the beginning revived, stronger now for its repression. The hatred which had risen between herself and Scarlett burned so fiercely that she began to see more clearly. This rush to Tungas—why were they making it? She had caught snatches of conversation that showed her one thing very plainly. Scarlett was afraid that Torquil might catch up with them before they reached Tungas. Apparently it wouldn't matter if the two of them met afterwards. Then what was it Scarlett was so anxious to get rid of? Was it something he had stolen? Stolen!

The secret dread that lay in the back of her mind suggested a solution. She refused to admit it, because it involved Ruthven. Was it feasible—was it reasonable to suppose that those two had not worked together in the business that was taking them to Tungas? And again came the imperative question: What were they taking to Tungas?

The thought of Blaise shivered across her mind. She was beginning to hate herself for the part she had played there. Scarlett had said that Torquil would revenge himself on them for bringing Manisty to the scaffold. She had reasoned with herself that if Manisty were guilty—but suppose he were not? And if he were not, then who was the man who should have swung for Moreau's death?

She got up and went on deck. The breeze was blowing freshly, and the waves played about the ship's prow, leaping up like young hounds. Scarlett saw Gillian pass, but he neither turned his head nor spoke. No sail broke the blue monotony of sea and heaven. Gillian felt an inordinate longing for the sight of land. What security could there be on this tossing water? Weary of the everlasting blue she wandered into the deck house. She sat down to think . . .

It was quite dark when she awoke. Startled, she sat up with a little gasp. How could she have dropped off to sleep like that? She rose, stretching herself leisurely and went outside. The stars were out. It must be late. Conscious of a sudden empty feeling, she went toward the companion in search of Natui and supper. Pau Tiau was at the wheel. Stiffling a yawn, Gillian moved to the cabin head. No light came up from below. Peering down, she saw that the sliding door between the room and the foot of the stair was shut. This was unusual.

Some instinct sent her down the companion as softly as a ghost. Like a ghost she set a stealthy hand on the door, to discover if it were bolted on the inside. It gave at her touch, moving imperceptibly until there was an inch wide space through which she could see into the room beyond. The voices of the two men within came clearly.

"I tell you I'm right. There's forty-five—and the head as well."

"Forty-six," came Ruthven's stubborn voice. "You can't count, Scarlett."

"Count? A lot of time we've had for counting the damn things!"

"I'm right. You always think you know best."

"Why are you trying to start a scrap?"

"We ought to break the thing. We can't sell it as it is. Everybody would smell a rat if we tried to—"

"Not everybody on Tungas. It's better not to break it up."

"Well, I don't agree. We'll get a damn sight better price for the stones separately. Remember Feuchter gets a third."

"And you're afraid I'll get one more than my share if there's an odd number! You're very Scotch tonight."

"Leave that out of it!"

"All right, don't shout. I'll get the thing out and we'll count."

"No. It's too risky. Gillian—"

"Gillian's asleep in the deck house. We'll hear her all right if she comes."

Scarlett got up and moved out of Gillian's line of vision. After a moment he returned to his chair, and Ruthven leaned forward eagerly.

"Careful," he said. "Lay it out here. Mind the head." Through the crack Gillian saw two heads bent over something.

"Forty-five," said Scarlett at last. Ruthven grunted. They drew back, and Gillian saw what lay between them.

On the table was a snake. It was twenty inches long, and its jointed body had forty-five parts held together by thin golden chains. Like green fire it lay there, burning with the fierce color of the emeralds of which it was made. Each stone was cut and graded in size. Gillian bit her lip to keep back an unguarded exclamation. Some patient, cunning hand had carved the largest stone into the semblance of a snake's head. Its beauty fascinated her. Under the rays of the hanging lamp the thing seemed alive. Ruthven picked it up, and the flawless stones gleamed in his hand like witch's fire.

"They're perfect," Scarlett said. "That's what makes the damn thing so valuable. It's the devil's own job to find emeralds of this size without flaws."

Watching their eager faces Gillian realized that this was what they were going to sell in Tungas. It was for this that they were hurrying north. But why lie about it? Why not tell her about it? There was some mystery—something they wanted to keep her from knowing. Curiously she watched the light on their faces. Ruthven was flushed, excited. His hands trembled a little. Continually he moistened his lips. Scarlett showed no sign of feeling. But his eyes ate up the jewels that Ruthven held.

"We must split it up," the red headed man said suddenly. "My God, we can't sell the thing as it stands. Maybe some one knows about it. We'd look well if it was recognized."

"No," came Scarlett's cold voice. "I'm not going to break it up. Why, look at it, man! Look at the settings—the little chains. We could ask what we liked for it."

"Too dangerous," Ruthven maintained obstinately. "A thing like this is bound to be known. And we'd get more for the single emeralds."

They wrangled on, but Gillian scarcely heard them. The jeweled snake had all her thoughts. She wanted to call out to them, to bid them take care. At Ruthven's suggestion that the stones be separated she felt a little thrill of horror. Destroy that beauty? Not if she had any say in the matter. And why hadn't she? What was all this nonsense about keeping it from her? She threw up her head with determination. Her hand moved on the door. The next moment she halted, frozen stiff as the truth crashed into her mind.

Scarlett had the snake in his hand. He was examining the head.

"Chinese work," he said.

Gillian heard Ruthven's answer.

"I wonder how old Moreau got it?"

II

ALL THROUGH the night Callaghan held the *Peregrine* against the wind. With morning came a lessening of the storm. The wind shifted with the sun, veering toward the east. Red eyed, stiff with cold, Callaghan gave up the wheel to Torquil. Staggering a little in his walk he stumbled below, stripped off his clothes and rolled himself in a blanket. He dropped into his bunk after swallowing a hot whisky, and fell into sleep like a stone dropped into a well.

On deck Torquil glanced over his shoulder at a smoldering sky where the sun showed like a livid coal. It was touch and go whether the storm would break again toward midday. He felt his eyes heavy with sleep and jerked his head angrily in a determination to keep awake. He dared not trust one of the boys with the task of steering in this tricky sea. The waves still ran high, tearing at the ship as though they owed her a grudge for her escape in the night.

Torquil coaxed her westward, striving with all his might against the treachery of the current that would lure her too far south. The task took all his strength, and he felt a new admiration for Callaghan who had held her safe through the storm. Callaghan was of an older generation. He was rough and very often cruel. He had little tact, few manners, and the morals of a man who had lived since boyhood under a hot sun. Unlettered, unpolished, ignorant of modern methods and an inveterate opponent of new-fangled ways, yet he stood in Torquil's mind as the equal of any man in the Pacific. The lives that Blaise had cast into the hazard Callaghan had saved by his strength, his determination, his profound knowledge of the way of a ship upon the sea . . .

Torquil's thoughts swept round to Blaise. How would this matter end between them? He told himself that it didn't count; that nothing could impair the friendship that held between them. Yet he knew that he deceived himself.

Just before nine o'clock they got clear of the current. There was no longer that drag on the keel. Torquil had an absurd impulse to shout. The swirling waters beat high about the *Peregrine* but Torquil paid no heed. The worst was over. The relentless sweep of the current had been left behind. Glancing back, he could still make out where the sinister drag of the water lay. With any luck the *Peregrine* should run before the wind without more trouble. The reefs—yes, they had to be reckoned with. But a ship that had weathered the preceding night wasn't going to be killed by those knife edges that lurked under the water. He and Callaghan between them would see her through. He began to sing.

He became aware of a figure beside him. It was Blaise, still in his wet clothes. Startled, Torquil swore at him.

"Damn your eyes, why haven't you changed?"

Blaise made no answer. He had the blank expression of a sleepwalker.

"Go below," said Torquil. "Why aren't you wearing your oilskins, you fool? You didn't put 'em on last night at all. You're shivering now."

A fit of shuddering had seized Blaise.

"If she'd—gone down last night," he said jerkily, "I'd have been a murderer."

He turned a bloodless face to Torquil.

"Why did you catch hold of me last night? Do you think I'd have cared a damn if I went over? It would have been a way out. There's not much joke in being alive with all this—this mess-up."

"You go and tell Moro to rub you down," Torquil ordered. "I don't want a sick man on my hands. Have some hot Scotch and go to sleep. I can manage with the boys."

Blaise hesitated.

"Get away," Torquil shouted, irritably. "You'll want all your strength in a day or two. We ought to cross their trail pretty soon."

"And then?"

"What do you mean—'and then'?"

"Torquil," said Blaise, swaying as he spoke, "guess you've got the right to do

what you like in this. But see here, Gillian—"

"Well?" Torquil's face went cold and hard.

"You're not to touch her," said Blaise desperately. "I suppose you're planning to shoot those two and sink the *Flying Spaniard*. But you'll have to save Gillian."

"And why?" said Torquil.

"She's a woman."

"Go below!" Torquil said harshly.

When Callaghan came on deck toward noon, Torquil was all in. Callaghan blinked at him.

"'Strewth, you're pretty pop eyed. How is she?"

He took over from Torquil, and sniffed the air suspiciously.

"Storm's over," he announced. "We ought to be all right for twenty-four hours."

Torquil went below. Callaghan was himself again—but Blaise . . .

He stepped to the lad's bunk. Blaise lay on his face, his rough brown head buried in his arms. Torquil thought, "What'll his life be if he's going to feel things so intensely?"

CHAPTER VII

SCARLETT EXPLAINS

WHEN Gillian flung open the door and walked in, Ruthven and Scarlett turned like thieves. For a moment they all stood there, aghast at what had happened. The light fell on the three faces and showed them white, troubled, furious. In Scarlett's hand the green snake shivered with the sway of the ship. It was Ruthven who broke the silence.

"Where have you sprung from?" he asked with a sickly air of carrying the whole thing off as a joke. "I thought you were asleep in the deck house."

He mouthed on, with the imbecility that seizes men sometimes in the shock of discovery. Gillian paid no heed. Her eyes were fixed on the thing in Scarlett's hand. Scarlett's voice cut across Ruthven's like a blade.

"How much did you hear?" he asked harshly. "How long were you spying outside that door?"

Gillian faced him, staring back into his narrowed eyes.

"So that's why we're going to Tungas."

He caught her up sharply.

"Then you know. Shut up, Ruthven. It's no use trying to bluff now. She knows."

But Ruthven's nerve was going. He began to babble confusedly, clutching at Gillian's arm. She endured him, standing there like a woman frozen—past feeling anything except the one horror that blotted out all else.

"We couldn't help it, Gillian. We—we went up to see him about some pearls. He wasn't expecting us. He had his treasure spread out. We saw it through the window. When we went in he sprang at us. We had to defend ourselves. He might have killed us if we—"

"If you hadn't stabbed him in the neck."

"Stabbed him? How could we help it? He writhed about, trying to get at us. We didn't mean to kill him. Scarlett never meant to kill him."

"You're a liar," said Gillian, still in that frozen voice. "You meant to murder him. That's why you went up there. Two men against a poor stick like Moreau! Who held him while the other struck? I suppose Scarlett killed him. You haven't got the nerve."

Ruthven's pallor turned to a dull, sullen red.

"I've never killed a man."

He flung her arm away and stepped back from her. Something was at work in him—some slow deadly anger at his sister's words. His voice when it came was thick and unsteady.

"You talk like that—a woman! This is man's business. You don't understand. We never meant to kill Moreau. You have crazy notions about things—like all women."

"Why don't you tell me the truth?"

Gillian shot at him. "I'd rather know. I can't swallow all this drivel about accidents."

She spoke to Ruthven, but her eyes turned to Scarlett. From him she would get the truth. His hard face never changed while Ruthven spoke. He waited, holding the jeweled snake in his hand—waited for Ruthven to talk himself out, to betray, to lie, to bluster at last into silence.

"Tell me the truth," Gillian said to him.

"It was an accident," Scarlett told her. "It happened just the way Ruthven said. Moreau went for us. We tried to hold him back. I suppose we all got pretty worked up . . . When he was dead, we took—this."

He held up the snake.

"Why shouldn't we? You're not in a civilized country now. In these parts every man takes what he can. Don't spin any rot about missionaries and white man's justice. I admit there's a smear of whitewash on the top of things. But put your hand through and you'll find dirt enough underneath. If we hadn't taken this when we had the chance where would it be now? Locked away in the Resident's desk, while a search went up for Moreau's people? Hell, not on your life. It would be in some one's pocket. Feuchter's, perhaps."

Gillian was white to the lips.

"Then you did kill him."

"It was an accident, damn it."

"But—Manisty?"

THERE was a silence. Ruthven began to walk up and down like a caged animal. Little beads of sweat showed about Scarlett's mouth.

"Look here," he said at last. "you've got to see it from our point of view. Moreau was dead. Who was going to believe us when we said it was an accident? Ruthven and I would have been strung up like crows. The law doesn't allow for accidents. It puts all sorts of names to them."

"If it happened the way you said, you could have explained."

"Explained! Don't be funny. Have you ever tried to explain away a case like that? It came hard on Manisty, but it would have come harder on us."

"I don't believe you," she said slowly. "Scarlett, you killed Moreau. You meant to do it."

She was trembling.

"It's a lie," he retorted. "If you think your own brother would do such a thing—"

"Why shouldn't he? Do you think because I'm his sister that I'm going to see things crooked? Half the murderers in the world have had sisters. Has it saved them from murder? I suppose you expect me to strike an attitude and say, 'He's my brother. Therefore I will never believe anything against him.' That's played out. I'd be a fool to shut my eyes to things."

Ruthven stopped in his pacing.

"Gillian—"

"Don't speak to me," she flashed at him. "I can see now why you were both afraid of Torquil." A thought crossed her mind. "That boy, Natui—he was the one who saw Manisty wipe a knife. Will you have him in—let me question him?"

Scarlett hesitated, and in that instant Ruthven said—

"No."

"Yes," said Scarlett on the heel of his word.

Gillian looked from one to the other. Almost she laughed.

"Don't have him in. Ives, how Scarlett must hate it when you spoil all his plans! All right. Don't send for the boy. I know. You can't lie to me."

There came a cry from the deck for Ruthven, and he pushed past them, hurrying to answer the helmsman's summons. Left alone, Scarlett and Gillian confronted each other.

Her rage had but increased her beauty. Even in that moment Scarlett's eyes swept over the long slim lines of her tall

figure. Well, his chances were gone for good now . . .

"Do you hear?" said Gillian sharply. "What are you looking at me like that for?"

He forced his attention back to the matter in hand.

"Go ahead."

"I've said it. As soon as the ship touches port I'm going."

"Going where?"

"Anywhere away from you and Ives. Do you expect me to stay here with a couple of murderers?"

He caught his breath at the word.

"Don't be a fool. Tungas isn't any place for a white woman."

"I suppose there's somebody there who'll listen to me."

"Just what do you mean?"

"Do you expect me to shield you?"

"Ruthven's your brother."

"But you're not."

He saw then what she would do—she and Ruthven between them. They might concoct a pretty story, those two. In spite of Ruthven's peculiar loyalty to him, Scarlett knew that the fellow wouldn't stop to think if it came to a question of his own skin.

"You're going to turn traitor, eh—betray us? Well, what are you going to say? How are you going to prove it?"

"You're holding the proof," said Gillian.

He stared at the snake. At the slam of a door he did not look up. Hardly was he aware that he was alone. He did not answer when Ruthven shouted his name from the deck. For a long time he sat there, his eyes fixed on the jeweled thing for which he had murdered—twice . . .

II

IT WAS Blaise, straining his eyes through the darkness, who first saw the *Flying Spaniard's* lights. His shout brought Torquil to the foot of the mast.

"What is it?"

"Ship's lights ahead."

Torquil gave a sharp order. If it was as he thought there must be no slightest chance of the *Spaniard's* taking fright. The boys ran to do his bidding. Very soon the *Peregrine* was a darkened ship, raking forward through the night, straining to reach the prey. True, it might turn out a false alarm. It might be that in the morning they would sight some honest schooner, some pearling lugger bound for the northwest grounds. The wind was rising again, throbbing with a hint of weather in the offing. Torquil spat on his hands and went up after Blaise. Clinging between the sky and the sea they craned to get another glimpse of the green eye that was a ship's starboard light.

"If that's her, she's beating too far north for Tungas," said Torquil at last. "Tungas lies due west from here. Why should Scarlett be coming out of his way?"

Blaise shook his head.

"Don't believe it's the *Flying Spaniard*," he said. "Of course she'd have to take a northwest course. But not so damn northwest as that ship's making. Why, it's pretty well north."

They came down, doubtful, troubled by the green eye on the horizon. Callaghan shrugged his shoulders over it.

"No sayin' who it might be," he said. "North, eh? H'm. There's nothin' just about there 'cept Moselle."

He repeated the word thoughtfully.

"Moselle—no reason for Scarlett to put into Moselle. Yet it's just about the time that we ought to sight him."

"Follow it then," urged Blaise.

"Yeah, follow it and find some lugger or a tramp from Honolulu," said Callaghan. "An' while we're after that, Scarlett'll be in Tungas."

"We're not so far from Moselle," put in Torquil. "I say follow that boat. I believe it's the *Spaniard*. Hell, I don't know why—but I'm taking no chances. Lord knows why she should go up to Moselle. But where's the harm in altering our course a bit? Take us half a day at most. Well, we can spare half a day for the sake of making sure."

His word prevailed. Callaghan coaxed the *Peregrine* toward the northwest. All through the night they thrashed their way through a restless sea, chasing the green will-o'-the-wisp ahead. The sky thinned and the stars vanished. The sun came up behind the ship. With dawn the wind dropped a little. Callaghan stretched his cold body and gave over the wheel to Torquil.

"O Torikil," sang out Ruti from the lookout. "Him boat all same lost. No can see."

"We've missed her," growled Callaghan, blowing his fingers. "This damned wind's goin' to play hell with us. The *Spaniard's* a quick sailer. Built for speed, that boat."

Grunting disgustedly he went below, to find Blaise eating glumly. Between the two of them there hung a constraint that nothing could move. To Callaghan's mind, it was the boy's wanton foolishness that had plunged them all into this coil. Youth, that was it. Only be young, reflected Callaghan bitterly, and you can get away with the Ten Commandments all nicely smashed up and trampled underfoot. People always made excuses for youth nowadays. Even Torquil—but Torquil was young too. Young! Why, he wouldn't go back to twenty again for all the wealth in America. It was a rough time, a sore time, a bitter, heart breaking time. By thirty, now, a man had found his feet. A man knew by then that the only things worth having were the solid, tangible things of the senses—food, whisky, a dry bunk, cash at the end of the voyage, mastery over a ship, the power of kissing a woman with the lips but not the heart. He glanced at Blaise and found the lad staring at him. Callaghan banged down his mug angrily.

"Damn coffee's cold." he growled. "I'll get behind Raki with a belt by and by."

Blaise said nothing. A queer, resentful pity began to stir in the older man.

"It won't mend things for you to go round lookin' like a sick monkey," he rasped out. "We've lost the *Flying Spaniard*—if that light was her. But we're makin' for Moselle, just on the chance. It's pretty close to our course, anyway."

"I've been a swine," said Blaise, with abrupt passion.

"Yeah," Callaghan agreed blandly, "a damned swine. An' what Torquil ought to do is to take his belt to you. If it wouldn't mean a row with him I'd have done it myself long ago. But there, you'll get sense one day, I reckon. It's no good pullin' a long face an' moanin' about repentance. We'll all repent what you've done before long. But don't worry. You'll get the biggest share of trouble."

He drank some more of the lukewarm coffee and drew his hand slowly across his mouth.

"That girl," he said, and watched Blaise's quick tension.

"A woman like that," pursued Callaghan, attacking corned beef with vigor, "a woman with that shape an' that hair spells trouble, boy. An' see here—" he waved a loaded fork impressively. "Torquil and her—well, look out."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Callaghan, with his mouth full, "that if ever we get hold of the *Spaniard*, Torquil will settle her. Because of you. Get me? Gawd knows why he should set any store by a fool like you. But he does. Kind of feels that if it hadn't been for him you wouldn't be alive."

"It's true."

"All right. Well, that's why he's so bitter against the girl. No, he don't say what he thinks to you. But he does to me."

"What's he going to do?"

"Sit down. Sit *down*, you damned fool. An' don't shout. He'll hear you. Do? How do I know what he's going to do? Put her in the dock as accessory after the fact, more'n likely. Try to prove that she knew all about it an' helped Scarlett to make a getaway."

"It's a lie about her knowing!"

"How can you tell?"

He found a minute bone in the beef and

spat it forth with comments on the firm which canned the meat.

"How can you tell?" he persisted. "She's fooled you once. Women—God, they're liars born! You know nothin' about 'em."

The day wore on and as night drew near the wind dropped. The *Peregrine* sauntered languidly, and Callaghan's language blistered the deck. The breeze continued in that teasing state when it promises to develop any moment into a steady wind. Under the moon the gaunt sails loomed high. The stars hung low that night—so low that it seemed the mast must presently entangle itself among them.

Just before dawn the wind started to blow freshly again. Under full sail the *Peregrine* heeled and dipped and righted herself, again speeding north-northwest toward Moselle. With luck she should make that island by mid-afternoon. But for the lack of wind she would have made it six hours earlier.

Six hours earlier . . .

CHAPTER VIII

CASTAWAY

THE *FLYING SPANIARD* dropped anchor just before midnight off Moselle. In the moonlight Scarlett made out the great shouldering mass and heard the unmistakable sound of waves breaking on a beach. He dared not risk a night landing. Fuming, he decided that it would be foolhardy not to wait for dawn. There had been no sign of pursuit—surely they could take their ease a little.

Ease! What ease was there ever to be again for himself and Ruthven? He had been having dreams these last few nights. The snatched hours of sleep brought him no peace.

Scarlett leaned over the taffrail and stared at the drowned stars. The thought of Gillian put an icy finger on his heart. What would she do when they reached Tungas? Suppose she laid information against him and some one took the trouble to investigate? There were plenty of people on Tungas who would be quite willing—almost eager—to investigate any little rumor in which Scarlett's name was involved.

The problem was real. If Gillian talked, and her brother stuck to the same story, it would go hard with Scarlett. And why shouldn't they? They both hated him. Scarlett remembered that odd episode when the fellow walked off and left him, only to come skulking back because of the curious tie that would bind them while they lived. But Ruthven was irked by his bondage—a bondage that nothing but death would break.

"They've got my life in their hands," said Scarlett aloud.

The most deadly foe was Gillian. She must be the one to be put away first. Her very presence was a menace. He knew her well enough by now to know that she was like cold steel. Nothing would save him once they got to Tungas.

He began to walk restlessly up and down. Moselle lay like an enchanted castle, battlemented in the moonlight. Pity it were not a castle, so that he might lock the door on Gillian, leave her—

Leave her!

Into his feverish brain sprang a plan. He examined it, and found no flaw. God, yes, he'd do it!

As he stood there, tranced by his thoughts, Ruthven came heavily on deck.

"Can't sleep," he said. "My head aches. What are you doing up here?"

"Breather," answered Scarlett curtly. "Natui and Pau Tiau are on watch somewhere about. I'm going to wake 'em up and then turn in again."

He moved away and Ruthven followed the dark form. They were to the leeward of Moselle, and the breeze was very faint. On deck the shadows lay black and sharp.

Scarlett said abruptly:

"Let's go below. I could do with a drink."

Without a word the two of them went down the companion. In Scarlett's mind throbbed the thought of the thing that he

meant to do. Ruthven must be got out of the way.

The two of them sat down at the table. Scarlett shouted for glasses. He splashed out a drink for Ruthven.

"Bit chilly tonight," he said. "Come on, drink up."

They began to talk. With skilful deliberation Scarlett led the talk to Ruthven's experiences. Ruthven was flattered, pleased. He began to talk. He talked on and on . . .

Scarlett barely listened. But presently Ruthven reached across the table and shook his arm to attract his attention.

"Do you hear?" He was quite drunk. "I wish we were out of this. There's no luck about this trip. That snake of Moreau's—last time we laid those emeralds on the table I saw the shadow of Moreau's fingers on 'em." His feverish eyes stared at Scarlett. "Shadows—I keep seeing 'em."

"Rot," said Scarlett.

Almost nonchalantly he pushed the bottle toward Ruthven. Ruthven maundered on, dimly aware that he was drinking too much. He began to miss his words, to hiccough a little, to grow confused when he tried to answer a casual question. He became quarrelsome, then maudlin. Every time he emptied his glass Scarlett filled it. Ruthven's accomplishments did not include carrying his drink well. His head sank to his chest. Again and again he jerked it up, continuing some absurd argument that he had started about the race between the *May Queen* and the *Reindeer*. By and by he stopped talking. The heavy lids closed. His body sloped forward and his head fell on his arms that lay outstretched on the table.

Scarlett did not move. It was nearly four o'clock. As soon as dawn came he would put his plan into operation. Ruthven wouldn't stir for three or four hours. By the time he awoke, they would be far out at sea again. It shouldn't take above a couple of hours to replenish the water casks.

He got up and went to his bunk. Not to sleep. No, there would be time for that later. But he wanted to think, and the sight of the hulking Ruthven disturbed him. Grimly he sat there in the dark, waiting for the hour to strike.

II

GILLIAN woke with a start. What noise was that? Some one must have bumped into her door. She turned over lazily, stretching her bare arms high above her head. Then she remembered that they were at anchor. Soon the boat would put ashore for water. At the thought of feeling solid ground under her feet, even for half an hour, she flung off the blanket and began to dress.

When she came on deck she gave a little cry at sight of Moselle, all blue and gold in the dawn. Out of the sea came the sun in the gorgeous spectacular sunrise of the Pacific. Already the water was turning from violet to blue. The sharp sweetness of the air was like wine. Natui and Pau Tiau were busy with the longboat. Scarlett stood waiting.

"Where's Ives?" said Gillian.

"Asleep."

"I'll wake him. He'll want to go ashore."

"No. He doesn't want to. Leave him alone."

He turned to superintend the lowering of the second water cask.

"Let me come ashore," said Gillian.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Oh, please yourself," said Scarlett carelessly. "But we won't be long."

"You'll have to make two trips if you're only taking two casks at a time," she pointed out.

Scarlett did not answer. In silence she swung into the longboat, refusing his sullenly proffered hand. The boys fell to their oars, the boat dipped between the little waves. Childishly, Gillian put one hand over the side, trailing it in the water. There was no reef to negotiate, and landing proved very simple. They ran the

boat on a spit of white sand and beached her. There was a smell of spices in the air. Down to the beach came the palms, stately, graceful, haughty as old princesses. A land crab scuttled away as Scarlett went forward into a tangle of shrubs toward the sound of rippling water. Bougainvillea grew here, and lemon, and the pink berried *kaka*, with its great white moon flowers. A green parrakeet flew shrieking over Pau Tiau's head and he ducked to avoid it.

"Don't go far," said Scarlett curtly to Gillian.

His eyes never left her as she sauntered about the gleaming beach. Her blue linen frock brought out the color of her eyes. Under her wide brimmed hat little curls and tendrils of hair showed against her cheeks. He watched the tall graceful figure as though he were learning every line of it by heart. She was throwing stones now, throwing with the easy swing of a boy. He turned away abruptly. The cask was almost full.

When they were rolling them down to the water's edge Gillian called to him.

"I'll stay till you come back with the second lot."

He turned away without a word. His voice came harsh and raucous as he directed the boys.

Left alone, Gillian turned to the interior of the island. There would not be time to go very far. Besides, the bushes grew too thickly for comfort. A little path ran between the palms and she followed it carelessly, stopping to drink from the spring where the boys had filled the cask. It was odd that Ives hadn't wanted to come ashore. But then, there were many things about Ives that she could neither explain nor understand. He was almost an alien, this brother of hers. Since she had known how Morcau died, she had avoided him.

The smell of marsh lilies warned her of a swamp and she turned back, still deep in her thoughts. The sun was higher now. Gillian decided that she would go back and see if the longboat were in. A thin rattling sound made her pause. It sounded like an anchor chain.

With a sudden instinctive panic she began to run. Across her path the *lianas* lay, waiting to trip her up. The jasmine stretched out its scented arms to stay her. Suddenly she loathed the hot, sweet air. Fear sprang up in her heart, and with it a longing for the rough salt wind of the sea. She hurried on, her face white, her heart beating thickly. The little path turned and twisted, and shot her out at last on to the wide empty beach.

The *Flying Spaniard* was under way, her sails spread to catch the morning breeze. Gillian shouted, waved. There was no answer. She stopped at last, standing quite still, watching the ship until nothing remained but the sea and the sky. In her hand she held her wide brimmed hat, and presently she looked down to find her fingers turning it round and round in an odd, mechanical way. For a moment the world spun about her. All the hidden terrors that lived on Moselle rose up and leered at her. But she knew that if she once gave way, she might as well throw herself into the sea. A great stone lay on the shore and she tore at it, lifting it high. With all her strength she crashed it down on the print of Scarlett's foot in the sand. The violent action subdued the rising wave of hysteria. It left her exhausted but calmed. She sat down and rubbed her damp hands on the warm sand.

"Damn his eyes," said Gillian.

THE KANAKAS had shown surprise when Scarlett ordered them to draw up the longboat. They hesitated when he told them curtly that no second journey would be made.

"Him Gillian," said Pau Tiau timidly.

"Him Gillian stop all time Moselle," retorted Scarlett. "Say no come back *Sepania*. Bimeby come back fetchem Gillian."

"But Sekeleti, him Rutian all same beat suppose Kanaka no fetchem him Gillian."

"Rutian no savvy," retorted Scarlett. "Suppose you tellem Rutian him Gillian stop all same Moselle, you get beat all same like devil."

Still they would not move. Their dark anxious eyes besought him again.

"Sekeleti, him Gillian all same likem stop?"

"All same likem," Scarlett nodded. "But you no tell Rutian. Savvy?"

"Savvy," they answered reluctantly, and dispersed to their jobs.

The anchor was drawn up. It lay on deck. The ship swayed under the billowing canvas, and Scarlett felt her leap beneath his hand. Slowly he turned her westward. Beyond the horizon lay Tungas.

He wondered what Gillian would do when she realized that he had abandoned her. What would any woman do? Sit down and have hysterics? Probably. But Gillian wasn't—any woman. Most likely she would curse hard and then look for a place to sleep that night. Most likely the island tribe would find her sooner or later. Well, they wouldn't kill her. Whites were *tabu* with them. She'd be safe enough.

The hour wore away, and the *Flying Spaniard* ran steadily before the wind for Tungas.

CHAPTER IX

THE *PEREGRINE* TAKES A PASSENGER

CALLAGHAN had the glasses. He stood with his stocky legs far apart, balancing himself to the sway of the ship. They were passing Moselle. The sun was sliding down the sky. Already the shadows were beginning to creep along the deck. Moselle lay like a giant fortress in the clear light. There was no sign of a ship as far as the eye could see.

"Guess we were wrong," Torquil was saying gloomily. "It couldn't have been the *Flying Spaniard*. Or if it was, we've missed her."

He stared at the island.

"Damn the wind," he said. "If we'd got here this morning maybe we should have seen something of her."

"You would come," Blaise pointed out. "You were so sure you were right. As it is—what's up, Callaghan?"

"Hell!" said Callaghan. "Come here, Torquil."

He thrust the glasses into the other's hand.

"See that? No, more to the right. That's it. On that rock, wavin' a hat. In blue. See?"

"My God," said Torquil. "What's a woman doing on Moselle?"

He laid down the glasses and they stared at each other. It was Callaghan who put their thought into words.

"We're too far off to tell. But seems like it's—Ruthven's sister."

"Gillian Ruthven!"

They turned at Blaise's voice. He stood behind them, his face flushed, his eyes shining.

"Gillian? On Moselle?"

"We think so," said Torquil coldly. "There's a woman there, anyway. Most likely the *Spaniard's* away among the rocks somewhere—a nice little trap. They must have sighted us in the night and guessed what our line would be."

"Yeah," Callaghan agreed. "It's a trap, all right."

Torquil seized Blaise's lifted arm. The boy's eyes were flaming now, and Torquil felt a queer, sick pain at the sight.

"Shut up," he said bruskly. "We don't know that it's the girl. The thing is, what to do? If it's a trap, I'm damned if I'll walk into it. If it isn't—if there's a woman there and we don't take her off—"

"What's a woman doin' alone on Moselle?" Callaghan demanded. He took the glasses again. "Reckon we ought to go in a bit closer," he said. "If we could get near enough to see whether it's her, we can tell better what to do."

Torquil took the tiller from Raki, and swung the *Peregrine* round. Cautiously they crept toward Moselle, every eye alert for a sign of the enemy. But as the rocks loomed larger the closest scrutiny

could discover no sign of any lurking ship. Nearer, nearer went the *Peregrine*, huddling distrustfully through the waves. In the bows stood Blaise, straining eager eyes. Callaghan watched him without speaking. Ah, that girl was all he thought of, young fool. It didn't matter to him that they might all be walking into an ambush.

Suddenly Blaise's arm dropped to his side.

"It's Gillian, all right," he said.

"Well, you'd know if any one would," returned Callaghan. "If she's there, where's Scarlett? Where's the *Flying Spaniard?*" He spat. "Almighty, does he think we're goin' to be caught by a trick like this? He's deep—to set that girl wavin' her hat at us. That's cute of Scarlett—but we ain't fallin'."

His lips took an ugly twist as he strode over to Torquil.

"It's her. Better put about."

"You think it's a trap?"

"What else?"

"There's no sign of a ship?"

"Well, you fool, is there likely to be? He'll be hidin' somewhere near."

"You mean Scarlett?"

"O' course, you fool."

"All the same, if there's been some accident that she got left there—"

"Accident be blowed!"

They looked at each other, hesitant, undecided. They knew Scarlett's ways.

"Better lay off a bit an' wait," said Callaghan at last.

"What are you waiting for?" demanded Blaise, coming up angrily. "It's Gillian. She's stranded. Can't you get a move on instead of tacking about like this?"

Torquil glanced at the boy's face.

"We're going to lay off a bit. It's a trap."

"You mean you won't—"

"Yes, just that!" Torquil shouted at him. "Who's running this ship? I'm damned if I'll be made a fool of by you again. What do you want us to do? Run right in and let Scarlett pick us off with rifles?"

Blaise turned away. His face was crimson with anger. He called the boys and they began to lower the longboat.

"What the hell are you doing?" demanded Callaghan.

Blaise flung round.

"I'll take the longboat and go myself. We're not more than a mile out. You can watch what happens to me. If there's an ambush, clear out. If not, come on."

"Come back, you perishing fool!" Torquil roared at him.

THEY heard the splash of the longboat's keel on the water. At a sign Callaghan took the wheel from Torquil's hands. Torquil hurled himself across the deck.

"Blaise!"

"Take your hands off me—let me go!"

"You're not leaving this ship."

"Why the hell not?"

"Because I say so."

"What do I care what you say? Gillian's there."

Torquil stepped back, releasing his hold on Blaise. He shook his head hopelessly.

"Very well, we'll go in," he said harshly.

Blaise grunted and walked away. Without a word Callaghan headed the *Peregrine* straight for Moselle. Like Torquil, he saw that if they were to go on together, it was the only thing to do.

A silence fell on the three of them. The boys crowded forward, chattering excitedly at sight of that solitary figure who waited for the ship. But the white men spoke not at all. What was there to say? In the minds of two of them there was not the slightest doubt that they were going straight into a trap. And in the mind of the third there was room for only one thought.

Four hundred yards offshore they dropped anchor. Torquil and Blaise stepped into the longboat. Left aboard with the boys, Callaghan loaded his pipe.

The longboat drew in. The rowers un-

shipped their oars and stepped over into the shallow water. They beached the boat, pulling it well up on the shingle. The dying light fell redly. Torquil and Blaise straightened themselves and turned to Gillian.

She stood between them and the sunset, so that they saw her against the background of the flaming sky. Very tall she seemed—tall and proud; a queen from her feet to her sun burnished hair. It was Blaise who broke the silence. Suddenly he went stumbling over the shingle toward her.

"Gillian," he said. "Oh, Gillian!"

He caught her hand.

"I thought you weren't coming," the girl said unsteadily. She was very pale. Under the reaction her lips were not quite firm. She tried to smile. "You were a long time making up your mind, weren't you?"

"I wasn't," he said eagerly. "But the others—"

He remembered that Torquil was standing by. Abruptly he turned. Torquil did not move.

"Where's Scarlett?"

"Gone."

"Obviously," said Torquil. "But where? And how soon may we expect him back?"

"I don't know."

"What do you mean—you don't know?"

"He left me here," said Gillian.

The shock of relief was almost too much to bear. She felt her knees trembling and sat down on the shingle. Blaise followed every movement with his eyes, but Torquil was searching the horizon.

"If this is a trap I warn you it'll go badly with you."

"It's not a trap," said Gillian weakly. "We quarreled. I was a fool to come ashore at all, but I never thought he'd do a thing like that."

Torquil fastened on her words.

"What did you quarrel about?"

"I found out—something."

"What?"

"Oh, don't bully," Blaise interrupted fiercely. "Can't you see she's played out? How long have you been here, Gillian?"

"Only since this morning. It's seemed like days."

"Let's get her back to the boat," Blaise urged.

Torquil looked across to the *Peregrine.* Over the water came the voice of Callaghan raised in command. The sun had gone and night rushed across the sky. Blaise went to the longboat and lighted a lantern. The boys launched the boat and Blaise waded back to help Gillian. He set her down in the stern and they pushed off. The boat shot across the quiet water of the bay.

II

"WHERE are they?" Callaghan took no notice of Blaise's glowering eyes. They were all in the cabin, and Raki was clearing away the remains of Gillian's supper. Very pale and composed she sat, her hands folded, her slim ankles crossed. Opposite her stood Callaghan, with Torquil astride a stool. Behind her stood Blaise. The hanging lamp cast its yellow light on the four determined faces. Their voices rang out in the stillness, clashed, withdrew, as the combat went on.

Gillian looked at the two hostile questioners opposite—at Callaghan, weatherbeaten, shrewd, tough; at Torquil, cold with triumph. Ah, that was the one that she would need to fear. She shivered suddenly and felt Blaise's quick movement of reassurance.

"Where are they?" said Callaghan again.

"I don't know."

"Don't lie. You do know. We can't stir till we know where they've gone. If they're hidin' round the north side, you better spit it out, my girl."

"They're not round the north side."

"You swear that?"

"Yes."

"Then where are they?"

"Gone. They spoke of Tungas. But I don't know if they meant it."

"Yes, yes," said Torquil impatiently.

"We knew they were making for Tungas. But why did they change their course?"

"We ran short of water."

"Oh, you did, did you?" said Callaghan. "Likely story. Where are they hidin'? Out with it."

"On their way to Tungas, I suppose."

"But what's the game?" Callaghan hurled at her. "Blaise, you shut up. Miss Ruthven, you may as well tell us the truth. Now, when are they comin' back?"

"I don't know. I don't think he meant to come back!"

"Why not?"

"He meant to leave me there," said Gillian fiercely. Her hands clenched. "He didn't want me at Tungas."

"Why not?"

"Because I knew he killed Moreau."

"You've known that a long time," put in Torquil. "Why should he suddenly make a fuss about it?"

"I haven't known it a long time. What do you mean?"

He leaned forward.

"You knew it when they sentenced Manisty to hang."

"It's a lie," she said hotly. "I didn't know it. I found out by chance."

Torquil laughed.

"Pretty—but you won't kid us like that. I'm not Blaise—I'm not in love with you, to be fooled by your lies. You and Scarlett and Ruthven—a nice little lot. An old man dead and an innocent man hanged for it—"

"You can stop at that! Do you think if I'd known that I'd have held my tongue, even to save my brother?"

"Yes. I reckon any woman would hold her tongue to save her brother—and her lover."

With a swift movement Gillian caught Blaise's arm as he gathered himself to spring. At her touch he checked himself, quivering.

"He wasn't my lover," she said to the mocking face that was Torquil. "I hated him. When he knew that—"

"Go on."

"It changed him," said Gillian slowly. "And when he knew that I'd found out the truth about him—"

"The truth! You didn't know it when your were at Amanu, did you? What do you take us for? You've known all the time."

"I haven't," she said desperately. "Oh, why can't you believe me? It never entered my head till I heard them talking. They were looking at an emerald snake—and they wondered where Moreau got it. It turned me sick—I knew then they had killed him. They tried to bluff, but it wasn't any good. Scarlett knew that I'd never shield him after what had happened."

"H'm," said Callaghan doubtfully. "It don't sound much of a yarn."

"It's the truth," Blaise burst out. "Gillian, don't pay any attention to him."

"Then perhaps Miss Ruthven will be allowed to pay some attention to me," said Torquil coldly. "Is there any reason why we should believe you? You've tricked us once. You've made Blaise a traitor. He's told me what happened at Amanu." His mouth curled with scorn. "Look at the fool—it's a job to be proud of, isn't it!"

"I'm sorry," said Gillian simply.

"Tell him the truth," said Torquil savagely. "Let's have it all. Tell him you don't love him. Tell him you don't give a damn for him."

"She needn't," came Blaise's voice, hoarse with anger. "I know it. Leave her alone, can't you? Gillian, you're tired. Come on."

He turned to take her to the sleeping quarters that he had told Raki to prepare, but Torquil stopped him.

"Not yet. How do you know she is going to be allowed to stop here?"

Blaise stared at him.

"What do you mean?"

"Why should I give shelter to an enemy?" demanded Torquil. "I'm running this show."

"Oh," said Gillian, helplessly.

She looked from one to the other. Torquil's hostility was wearing down her

defenses. What could Blaise do against such an implacable foe? What hope was there in Callaghan's cold eyes? But, somehow, she realized in that moment that the battle lay between herself and Torquil. No matter what part the others played—allies, spectators, enemies—the thing had resolved itself into a duel between the two of them.

With a sudden resolution she choked back the sob that lurked in her throat. A smile crept about her lips. She flung off Blaise's hand and walked straight up to Torquil.

"You're afraid of me, really," she said.

Before he could answer she was at the companion.

"Blaise, will you row me ashore?"

He darted after her, pushing past Torquil impatiently. A moment later came the sound of their feet on deck. Callaghan laughed.

"All right," he said, as Torquil turned on him. "Torquil, I ain't laughin' at you. But that gal—hell, she's a beauty. Now I've seen her close, I can understand young Blaise a bit. An' see here. I reckon she's tellin' the truth. No, it ain't just because she's good lookin'. I ain't sayin' it for that. I believe she's told us right this time. It's just the kind of trick Scarlett would pull—the rat."

"You fool—"

"Say it after awhile," said Callaghan easily. "Listen, now—she's got to stay here tonight."

"Why?"

"Because if she goes ashore, Blaise will go there, too." They looked at each other. "Anyhow, it does look kind of like you're scared of her."

"What do you mean?"

"Him. Scared that you've lost him. And if you turn her out of here, you will lose that kid—for good. He's young—no tellin' what he'd drift into."

Halfway up the companion Torquil turned.

"We ought to get under way soon."

"Better wait till sun-up," Callaghan advised. "Stormy sky tonight."

Already Blaise and Gillian had the boys making ready to put off in the longboat. Across the dark water the island loomed, gaunt, mysterious in the night. A light showed on the beach. No doubt the natives had stolen down under cover of darkness to see what they could of the invader.

"Miss Ruthven," Torquil said, "I've decided you're to stay aboard. Blaise, take her below."

"All right," said Blaise curtly. "Gillian, come down. I'll show you where you're to sleep."

Tall, silent, disdainful she went by like a wraith as she followed Blaise down the companion. Left alone, Torquil watched that furtive flickering light among the trees. The natives were reputed shy but friendly. Also they held the white man *tabu*. Years ago they had had a white chief, a castaway who had first fascinated, then subdued them. No, there was no danger, Torquil insisted with a faint uneasiness. Yet he would feel safer when they had left Moselle behind . . .

CHAPTER X

RUTHVEN'S MASTER

AT DAWN a deputation arrived from Moselle. Nine large canoes and five small ones appeared. In the first sat solemn looking chiefs, rowed by the tribesmen. The former were heavily tattooed with sinister patterns in bright purple. On their cone shaped heads great bushes of hair stood up, decorated with parrakeet feathers and hibiscus flowers. Each of them wore a tooth necklace—a mark of rank on Moselle. These teeth were supposed to be collected from vanquished enemies. In the case of a pacifically minded or unaccomplished person the deficiency was supplied by means of a small stone hammer and a couple of inferior wives, securely held.

The head of the tribe was a gorgeous fellow. He must have been nearly seven feet tall. His skin was lighter, glossier than that of the other men. From his ears hung heavy ornaments. He had the chest

and shoulders of a bull. Across his right cheek three parallel lines were tattooed. He wore a short cloak composed entirely of parrakeet feathers, and a gaudy "trade" *pareu*.

Torquil swore.

"What the hell do they want now?"

But he knew better than to appear ungracious. He and Callaghan armed themselves with presents—small mirrors, safety razor blades, beads, colored handkerchiefs—and waited resignedly while the visitors swung gaily aboard and investigated everything within reach. The shrill chattering awoke Gillian, asleep at last after a night of tossing. On deck a heap of gifts was accumulating—breadfruit, fresh coconuts, pineapples, small tomato-like berries that tasted like strawberries, bananas and yams. Torquil and Callaghan returned the salutations of the chiefs, handed them the trade presents with becoming gravity and repressed a desire to boot them off the ship.

But it became evident that this was no ordinary visit. Presently the tall chief emitted a parrot-like squawk, and at this signal his followers rallied from all quarters and squatted round obediently, while he stood up and spoke at great length. The white men could understand no single word. Even Callaghan was not familiar with the Moselle dialect. The *Peregrine's* boys, listening eagerly, were evidently puzzled until they caught a word here and there and made out the sense.

When at last there was silence it was apparent that an answer was expected. Torquil scratched his head.

"Raki," he said sharply, "no can savvy. You savvy all same one fella big Kanaka say-so, you get bullamacow—corned beef."

"O Torikil, him say must have white man. Long time white man, all same good luck. No white man day-a-day—now—all same bad luck. Torikil one fella big white. Him Kanaka say Torikil stop."

"You tellem no," commanded Torquil sharply. He turned to Callaghan. "I know the way that ends. Callaghan, we'll get out of here."

Raki stood up and spoke as best he could to the assembly. Callaghan strolled negligently away, and he and Blaise began to haul up the anchor furtively. The noise of discussion swamped the rattle of the chain. Glancing up, Callaghan saw Torquil, stormy looking. The islanders were standing now, closing in on him, arguing, urging. Things began to look dangerous. Callaghan saw the tall chief speak to a fellow who went over the side to the waiting canoes.

"Callaghan! Blaise!"

The Kanaka mob, after their kind, were growing restive with the delay. Even to their intelligence it was plain that Torquil would not stop at Moselle to be their sacred white chief. The *tabu* still held. They would not touch him; nevertheless the mass of dark faces had an ugly look.

Torquil saw that the *Peregrine* must get off as quickly as possible. The islanders were in a dangerous mood. Who could say how long the *tabu* forbidding them to touch a white man would hold? Human nature has a way of overriding prohibitions. If the mob made a sudden rush . . .

HE MOVED and the crowd moved with him. With his brawny arms he cleared a way through the hostile swarm. His hands gripped the wheel. Slowly the *Peregrine* began to swing round. At the first movement the Moselle people started violently. Torquil paid no heed to their torrent of words. Seeing that they were being carried away from the shore, they piled over the side pell-mell, fighting and struggling in their eagerness to reach their canoes.

"Damn blighters!" roared Callaghan, helping a laggard with his foot. "Pity they don't drown."

He and Blaise looked back at the discomfited islanders. The tall chief could be seen clambering into his boat in undignified haste. He shouted, waving his

arms. Immediately half a dozen of the larger canoes turned seaward in pursuit. Across the water they came, with incredible speed, under the impetus of long oars pulled by strong arms.

Callaghan yelled to Torquil:

"They mean business. Watch out for trouble if they get within bowshot. Better get out to open sea as quick as we can. Wind's risin'. Their craft can't stand rough water."

Torquil nodded, and began to run before the wind due south. It did not matter if they went out of their course a few miles. It was imperative that the pursuers should be thrown off. So intent was he on leaving the canoes behind that he grew careless of all else.

It was Callaghan who remembered the sunken reefs that lie like knives under the sea around Moselle.

"Look out for them reefs on the port side," he warned.

He had hardly spoken when there came a sinister, scraping sound. The *Peregrine* lurched heavily and righted herself with a mighty effort. Torquil swung his helm hardaport. The ship swerved out of danger, and Callaghan wiped his face.

"Keep her out," he said. "Them crows, they're fallin' back."

But there was no need. The *Peregrine* got into her stride again, and the Moselle islanders dropped back, disheartened. Presently the canoes turned slowly back toward the island. Blaise and Raki were below, exploring for damage from the reef which the *Peregrine* had scraped.

When Gillian came on deck, pale, heavy eyed, she found Callaghan still staring at the fast receding island. He turned at the sound of her step and contemplated her soberly.

"Sleep well?" he said briefly. "Had any breakfast?"

Gillian smiled at him.

"It's nice of you to be friendly," she said. "You know, I can understand a bit how you feel. It's—rather decent of you to make the best of it."

Under this accusation of chivalry Callaghan blushed and moved uncomfortably.

"Oh, well—" he said at last.

Conversation languished. At last Blaise appeared. He spoke to Gillian, striving to appear at his ease, but his tongue bungled the words. He stammered and went away. Callaghan shrugged.

"He's young," he said to Gillian. "You've hit him pretty hard."

"I suppose so," she agreed, listlessly. "I'd alter it if I could. But it's too late. I'm sorry. And even Torquil can't hate me worse than I hate myself when I think about it."

"Best keep out of his way," Callaghan advised. "Women ain't no good aboard ship."

He sauntered away, sniffing at the wind as though he scented rain in it. Left alone, Gillian turned to the sea. The flying spume caught her dress, spattering it, and she realized that her wardrobe was now extremely limited. This trivial fact did what the battle of wills on the preceding night had been unable to accomplish—brought home to her the utter forlornness of her situation. There was no one to whom she could turn except Blaise. No matter what happened to her, there was only this hot, eager boy. And what was he, against the indifference of Callaghan, the open and determined hostility of Torquil?

"It's rotten being a woman," said Gillian, and blew her nose fiercely.

Torquil ignored her. Twice he had passed close by without a word. Callaghan was plainly resentful of her presence. Blaise—somehow she could not bear to think of Blaise. She turned restlessly, trying to make out Moselle, now almost on the horizon. The wind was blowing freshly; the sun strode through a cloudless sky. A sense of fear swept over Gillian. Her sensitive Scots blood pricked at the coming of disaster. Swaying, she shut her eyes, and immediately she was aware of the sea. She shivered and opened her eyes with an effort. It was good to see the deck of the *Peregrine*, to know that the ship stood between her and the sea.

Yet she could not shake off the feeling of malaise. It haunted her so that she paced uneasily up and down, oblivious of Torquil at the wheel. He watched her in spite of himself, noticing almost against his will how her body swayed with the sway of the ship. What was worrying her now, he wondered. His antagonism towards her had not altered. But if her story were true—

He jerked his thoughts back to the ship. She was rolling queerly. He swung her a point to starboard and she lurched drunkenly. The sweat started on his face. That hidden reef off Moselle . . .

He heard Callaghan shouting madly, and there was a rush of feet toward the hold. He dared not leave the wheel. His strained ears could make no sense of Callaghan's muffled roars. He wiped his forehead against his sleeve and stared ahead. The *Peregrine* was bucking heavily, clumsily, like a horse trying to get out of a river where it is drowning . . .

II

RUTHVEN awoke with a rotten head. He sat up, blear eyed, in his bunk, and drank some soda water. Then he groaned and lay down again. He felt as if his head were being cut open with blunt scissors. What on earth had he been doing to get so drunk the night before? For a time he lay stupid and inert, wholly occupied with the pain in his head. By degrees his memory seeped back. Scarlett and he had been below—both at the same time. Then they must have been at anchor. Yes, that was it. They were at Moselle, waiting to put ashore for water. Well, they must be moving again. He cursed the motion of the ship fluently.

He washed his face and went on deck. The wind stung him saltily and his head began to clear. Scarlett was at the tiller. They greeted each other curtly.

"I've been asleep," said Ruthven, stupidly. "Where's Moselle?"

Scarlett jerked his thumb at the horizon.

"Did you get the water?"

"Yes."

"Damn it all," said Ruthven irritably, "why did you let me get pickled last night? My head feels like hell,"

He sat down on the deck and rested his forehead on his hands.

Presently he pushed the hair out of his eyes and looked up.

"You didn't tell Gillian I was drunk, did you?"

"No."

"Where is she?"

"Haven't seen her since this morning."

"That's queer," Ruthven commented. "But Gillian *is* queer. And she hates you." He glanced round furtively. "We'll have to keep her on board when we get to Tungas. She knows too much."

"A damn sight too much."

"So do I," said Ruthven, nodding. "She and I—we know a lot, Scarlett." His eyes grew crafty. He stared up at the other's dark face. "She and I together could make up a pretty little yarn about you, Scarlett. Reckon you'd better mind what you do."

A muzzy insolence crept into his voice.

"We could break you with what we know," he said.

"Like hell you could! Don't forget you're in it as much as I am. Go and lie down again. You're only half sober."

But Ruthven sat on, muttering. It was pleasant to feel that he had, in a sense, the whip hand over Scarlett. Somehow, he could make Gillian hold her tongue. But if nothing would stop her, he would see to it that Scarlett got it right.

"I'm going to find Gillian," he said presently, getting up. "If she's sulking in her cabin, she can damn well come out. I suppose she's afraid of you. Well, I've warned you . . ."

"See here," said Scarlett. "I've been at this damned wheel long enough. Take over a bit. You're not a passenger on this lugger."

Unwillingly Ruthven took over the helm, and Scarlett went below. The

afternoon wore away and the sun began to make tracks for home. Straight ahead the sky turned dull gold, and the *Flying Spaniard* ploughed her way along a yellow furrow. The lookout was chanting a wild hymn to the dying sun god. The song was taken up by the boys below, and the pure voices rose and fell in a sweet, mournful cadence. Scarlett, eying the sails, listened unwillingly. Damn the beggars, why must they yowl their rotten music just at that moment!

He felt a tightening all through his lean, hard body. It was just a matter of time until Ruthven would discover that Gillian was not on the ship. Then . . .

SCARLETT went to the door of the girl's cabin and flung it open. It lay in the disorder in which she had left it that morning. The bunk was tumbled, the pillow depressed where her head had lain.

At the step in the companion Scarlett whirled. His acting was perfect. Ruthven was lumbering toward him, a curious menace in his heavy face, his eyes glittering with suspicion.

"My God!" Scarlett flung out his arms dramatically. "She's gone!"

Even Ruthven, alert from some trickery, was taken in. For just a moment he stood still in his tracks, his jaw dropping. Then he recovered himself and with a bound was past Scarlett, into the empty cabin. With stupid, unthinking fury he tore at the bed coverings, as if by main strength alone he would drag the girl into the light. Then he turned on his partner.

"You rat!" he roared, his face contorted and working. "This is your doing—where is she?"

But Scarlett had had his moment. He was composed, ready to subdue this mammoth of a man as he had always done. His voice was steady and cold.

"You idiot," he said without a tremor. "How should I know?"

Ruthven strode to him, towering fully a head above him. His great hands clenched and unclenched.

"None of your slimy ways with me, my friend," he said, his voice shaking. "I warned you. I warned you to keep clear of Gillian and, by God—"

Scarlett quietly took out a cigaret and lighted it, his hard eyes never leaving those of Ruthven across the flame. Suddenly, abruptly, he laughed—a sneering, cutting note in it that sent the blood draining from Ruthven's hot face.

"You—great—lout!" Scarlett said, spacing his words so that they fell like a lash. "You hysterical idiot! What could I have done with the girl? Search the ship, if you will, but—" he waited a space, and in that time Ruthven's eyes wavered ever so little—"be careful you do not suggest again that I've had anything to do with her disappearance. Just a warning, my boy . . ."

Indifferently he turned and walked away, leaving Ruthven staring down at his broad hands—hands that could have broken Scarlett like a match.

Scarlett took over the wheel from Pau Tiau, and presently Ruthven emerged on deck. There was something pathetic about the sag of the wide shoulders, that even Scarlett could see. But Scarlett hated anything he could dominate, and he did not relent as Ruthven went poking about the ship, conducting an absurd search into the most impossible places for Gillian. Presently the big man came and stood at the wheel. His voice was humble.

"She's not aboard," he said heavily; and suddenly flaring up, he cried—"My God, where is she?"

TO BE CONCLUDED

Smith Visits the Cine

By CHARLES A. FREEMAN

TONDO on Saturday night! Manila's most congested district is aglow with lights. Bands parade the streets. They are preceded by trouserless urchins bearing huge posters which portray the Filipino idea of cowboy and Indian action or, perhaps, of a crook drama. Everybody with the price is going to the *cine*, as the movies are called in Uncle Sam's bit of the Far East.

And John Smith, one of the few white residents of Tondo, is to take his fat Tagalog wife. She was a slender *dalaga* with long black hair reaching almost to her heels when John, as a discharged soldier, married her and joined the newly created army of "Never Goin' Backs." The *cine* is always a treat to Conching, and she bubbles over with joy as she powders her brown face before the glass.

"There will be a fine *pelicula* at the Cine Independencia," she tells her husband. "You'll like the picture, Juancho, because it is a Western."

John grins, but there's a touch of sadness in his eyes. He's nearing fifty, and thirty years have passed since he sold his saddle, bedroll and horse and, thrusting his six-gun in his shirt, entered that recruiting office back in Montana.

"Yeah, I sure like the Westerns," he admits.

Conching's toilet is now complete. Inserting a long black cigar between her teeth, she gives John's costume the once-over. It is perfectly correct from a Tondo point of view where half the men attend the *cine* barefooted and in what pass for shirts. The American is wearing stiffly starched white pajamas, and on his feet are green *chinelas*—heelless slippers. In downtown Manila he could not dress in this fashion; but out in Tondo, with its teeming brown and yellow thousands, who cares?

The *cine* is crowded when the Smiths arrive. But John, by paying the top price of thirty cents and judiciously flashing his Secret Service badge, is given a choice location in the balcony next to the rail. Both he and Conching kick off their *chinelas*, John resting his bare feet on the rail.

Below in the pit a brass band is tearing off a bit of recent American music. Boys pass, selling peanuts, soft drinks and *balangs*—grasshoppers roasted almost to a crisp. Every one is smoking or eating. John, being an American and thirsty, dispatches one of the peanut butchers for cold beer.

The first picture comes on and a chorus of hisses arises. John knows the hisses are not those of criticism but merely mean—

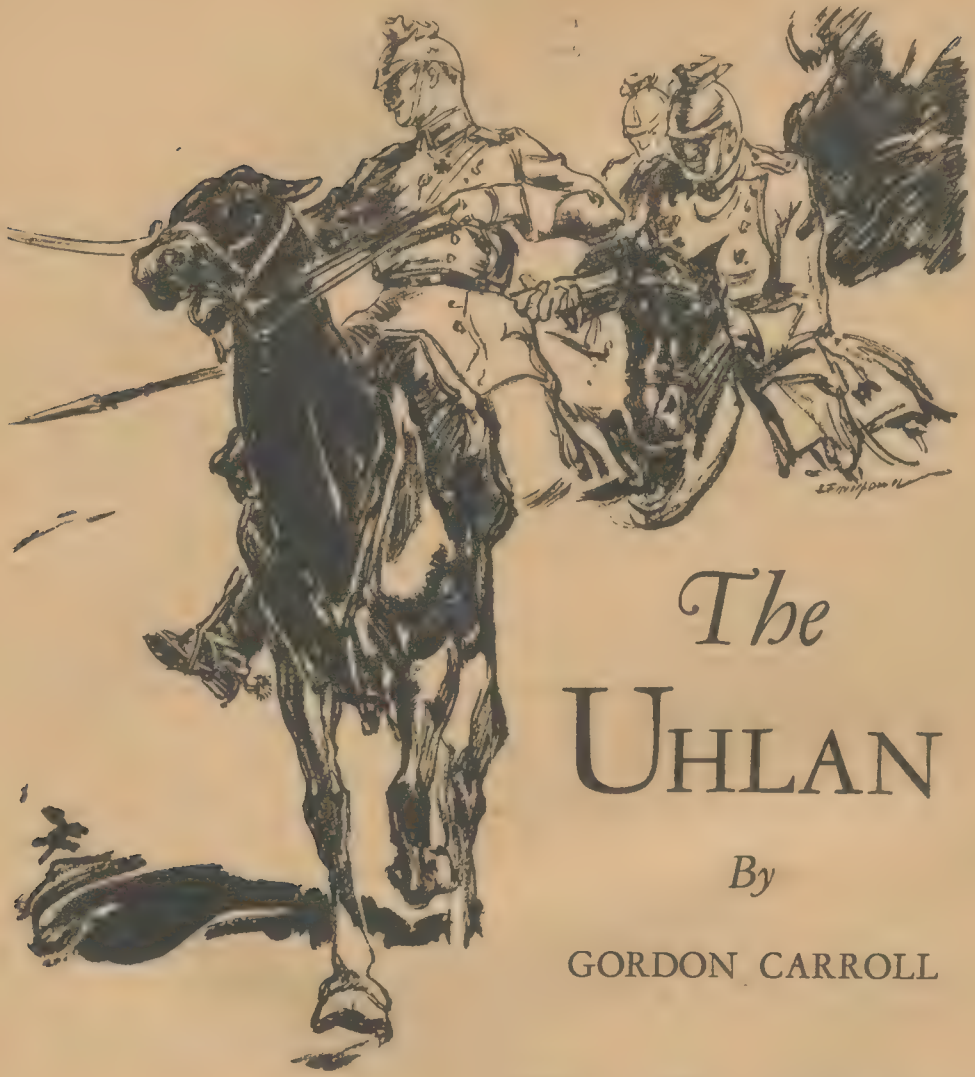
"Down in front!"

Next comes the *intermedio*, the half hour vaudeville show. It starts with a *kundiman*—folk song—by a popular actress garbed in the Balintawak dress of the provinces of central Luzon. She too is applauded, but when a male singer essays a comic song in the native dialect he is hooted off the stage.

The last portion of the entertainment is a *comico* featuring the usual troubles of a fat policeman. The crowd enjoys it immensely. But John, whose interest is only with cowboys, has gone to sleep.

"*Maharac ang buhay ko!* Ah, what a hard life I have with my sleepy American!" exclaims the scandalized Conching, shaking her spouse and carelessly tossing a cigar butt on the head of an unfortunate below. "Come, Juancho!"

A Story of the World War



The UHLAN

By

GORDON CARROLL

CAPTAIN STEFAN MUELLER, blond and tall in the saddle, glanced down at his boots. Dry and wrinkled they were, like an old man's hand, and uncomfortable. With an effort, he wriggled his cramped toes and grimaced. Somewhere in his kit were paste and polish, growing hard in the heat, and he decided to give them to his orderly that night. But Mueller's boots were not rubbed that night, or the next night, or ever, and the leather turned green with mold in a forgotten French farmhouse, used as a hospital for one day.

Five hours Mueller had been in the saddle, while the twelve Uhlans of his patrol trotted behind and drooped over their pommels, cursing the hot August sun for a blight on warfare. A finely powdered dust rose from the hoofs, coating men and equipment, until the riders turned gray like ghosts and blinked their

bloodshot eyes. From far to the north came the rumble of Krupp's drums, beating before the gates of Liége, while close by on every side, lay fields and forest, simmering and pulsating in the sultry heat.

Mueller drew forth a map from his tunic—the tunic that fitted close, like a glove, about his broad shoulders. By his own calculations they were ten miles within the French frontier, but from the chart in his hand they might well be across the Marne. These waving contour lines, drawn by a pasty clerk in the war office, who skulked behind his stool while soldiers hung their lives on his pen point. Bah! Maps were for others; Uhlans used their eyes.

Mueller wheeled sharply to the left, broke through the fringe of trees bordering the highway, and galloped up the hill. There, behind a sheltering screen of pine, he gazed far down the valley. Nothing! *Ach*, that was good. The captain doffed his leather helmet, loosened the clasps of his collar and dismounted. He motioned the troopers to do likewise. Soon the twelve men were stretched on the warm ground, their sweat soaked tunics unbuttoned, their lips moistened with canteen water. Life was good, but for that devilish sun penetrating the foliage above, and the monotonous boom of the guns, miles away to the north.

The captain lolled his head against a tree trunk and stared lazily at the sky, while the smoke from his cigaret spiraled up and joined the heat haze. His long legs rested on a carpet of pine needles, his tanned hands, flat and relaxed, felt the warm soil beside him. The sun, stabbing through the leaves, caught the yellow in his rumpled hair, the trim points of his mustache, the blue, like steel, in the eyes. Behind the high forehead, his soldier's mind was turning idly.

So far, the day had been perfect. Early that morning, while gulping his coffee at a farmyard door, he had taken field orders over the brim of his cup. He was to advance until he made contact with the enemy, or until the patrol had traversed twenty-five miles. The twenty-five miles were covered and the enemy was invisible; so he had halted.

Praise God that he should live to this day when the steel scourge of the Fatherland flashed wide above the frontier and drove the French to their coverts! Some one had told yesterday of the English landing twenty thousand troops at Calais. What of that? The black French or the blond British; there was little difference. More bodies to feel the slash of a Uhlan blade or the ripping point of a lance. At home, they were saying it was 1870 all over again. One decisive battle, maybe two, and then the flash of foreign metal in the *faubourgs* of Paris. It was the year 1914, the month of August, and the French were retreating.

At the moment Mueller liked to think of the past four years, when he lived in a gray, cold barracks. Four years midst the smell of sweat and leather, with the quirt of discipline flicking at one's back and the hand of tradition on one's shoulder. Those were days! The biting winter mornings when frost was everywhere and twenty men tumbled from their cots to curse the icy flagstones. At the first sparkle of the sun they were riding hard across the parade ground, stirrup to stirrup, saber to saber, and over them all, like a blanket, hung the wispy wraiths of heated breath. Now they were hard upon the dummies and a score of blades swung in unison; now the flying hoofs wheeled and thundered back, before the dismounted men at the barrack door could shout a challenging "Bravo!" It was the same winter and summer, except that in summer the riders sweated more and their sinews became like steel.

MUELLER learned other things in those four years; everything that gray haired officers knew about men, mounts, maps and metal. He learned that infantry were good fellows when kept in their place, which was to the rear of cavalry. He divined that artillery was necessary to warfare but not indis-

pensable. The engineers were beneath notice and when not building roads or bridges, should draw their spades and be put to trench digging. Aviators were fools . . .

The cavalry was the best of the army and the Uhlans were the best of the cavalry. That was as it should be, and so he had learned.

Now, at the end of the four years, the storm had broken and Mueller found himself—here on this French hilltop—calm and clear headed. Europe was aflame but the leaping tongues of fire had not yet reached the fabric of his mind. His thoughts in the main were sharp and clean edged. The Fatherland needed him. He was ready. He was a captain and, as such, he would serve wherever his brain and muscles were needed the most. There were others, he knew, who hunted honor and glory in the far-flung pageant of arms, but they were courting disappointment: the war would be won by those who threw their energies into the mass of men and supplies now moving relentlessly across the French countryside.

The thought of death never occurred to Mueller—it was too remote. And there was no home or family to weigh down upon him; he had had neither since the time he entered the *Gymnasium* at Frankfort, orphaned by a mine explosion in the great coal valleys of the Ruhr. Later, the barracks had been the only home he knew; there his stripling mind and body had changed into a man's, under the prod of iron taskmasters, whose harsh routine took the place reserved for parental discipline.

So it was that Mueller's thoughts, this day of August, 1914, merely revolved about the simple fact that it was war, and he was willing.

From the scabbard Mueller drew his saber and felt its edge. A rare piece of steel to waste upon parade ground dummies! He wondered how it would feel to cleave a skull, to smash a twisted face that stared at you through an eddy of smoke, to break free of the other's trappings and exult in the sun. Mueller gripped the handle hard and held the blade along one leg so that his troopers could not see. They would smile at him, he knew; but that was because they had no imagination. Imagination had made of Stefan Mueller a captain.

With one hand he lifted the binoculars from a leather case at his side and swept the valley. Heat waves, shimmering above the tree tops, blurred his vision and his blue eyes watered with the effort. He unfolded a heavy handkerchief, wiped his eyes, polished the binocular lenses in their dull metal cups. His glance roved again. Somewhere, far down the white road, he glimpsed the sparkle of reflected sun. Cuirassers? Hardly. They would not be this far—not to the rear. Yet the nostrils of his firm, Prussian nose trembled and, far down, he knew a revulsion of feeling. He motioned to one of his men.

"Klaussen, I see a glint of metal on the road. Ride to those trees—" he pointed to an arm of the forest that stretched away to the right— "and watch."

The trooper galloped off, lance erect, the gray-green of his uniform blending with the stubble of the field. Mueller lighted another cigaret, nodded his head idly. Those men in the cold buildings at Berlin—they thought of everything. The French wore blue, the English khaki, the Russians white and brown, all visible as far as a man could shoot. Mueller wondered how red would merge with the blue, the khaki, the brown and white; there would soon be plenty to spill.

Behind him, Mueller heard the troopers talking among themselves in clipped voices, their words and their tobacco smoke coming to his nose crisp and clean. What fine fellows! Tall and straight and bronzed, each showed affection for him in a dozen different ways; his food was a little better, his horse more carefully groomed, his kit kept in more perfect order than any other Uhlan captain he knew. It was the reward of his system and he was glad he had demanded it—that he had made his men understand as he did.

Mueller recalled the last inspection before they crossed the frontier. There was a village street, lined with quaint and bulging buildings; the sheen of equipment and the blue of the sky; the smell of baking bread in the air. A car rumbled along the cobbles, halted with a screech, and two men in capes stepped out. They glanced at Mueller's troop, spoke a few words in terse sentences, tumbled back into the tonneau and were gone. But what words!

"Splendid looking men—horses perfect—best seen yet—good luck!"

A clash of gears and it was over. That was living; it was worth the four years.

"Splendid looking men—best seen . . ."

Yet in spite of the rich thoughts, Mueller's face lost its firm lines, the straight mouth drooped; he dozed against the pine trunk until the beat of hoofs aroused him.

Klaussen dismounted at the fringe of the trees and picked his way through the reclining troopers.

"A score of Lancers—French." He was laconic. "Three kilometers away, maybe four, but they are moving rapidly on this road."

He gestured toward the white ribbon that threaded the trees at the bottom of the hill.

MUELLER leaped to his feet, the wrinkles ironed from his tunic as the trained muscles beneath flexed into life.

"Mount!" he shouted. Leather creaked, metal rang metal. "Follow—" and the patrol filed down the hillside and deployed at a turn in the road where the trees were whitened with August dust.

Mueller reined in, glanced hurriedly at his men—some hardly visible through the foliage. They were ready, his eyes told him—let the French swine come! Let them feel the Prussian heel and shoulder! He raised a bough with one hand and pushed his horse forward. The heat was frightful.

The red breeches of the enemy showed sharply through the dust. The Lancers rode easily and silently; even Mueller grudgingly approved their grace. At first, their appearance had puzzled him, but he had reasoned the answer quickly. Unsuspecting, the enemy thought the German advance far behind them. There had been no contact that day—only the rumble of guns away to the right. The bulk of Von Kluck's gray-green mass was marching across the north in seven-league boots; the red breeches were returning to the French pickets.

"Horses first," Mueller called in a low voice.

The carbines clicked with a queer, hard noise. Mueller quieted his nerves by a tremendous effort of will. His nostrils burned and his mouth was salty.

"Fire!" he cried.

The first volley downed half a dozen horses and the unscathed Lancers milled about the fallen men. Between the shots of his patrol, Mueller heard the dazed cries of the French, saw their slow efforts to reform. He rose high in his stirrups.

"Forward!" he shouted and the patrol broke cover, lances swinging down.

They charged into a welter of smoke and dust. Mueller sensed the pistol in his hand but did not know he had pulled the trigger many times until the firing pin clicked on an empty chamber. He flung the weapon straight into the features of a ruddy faced man and watched fascinated as a scarlet stain deepened the other's cheeks, and the Lancer fell.

Wheeling, Mueller raised his saber, gloried in the strength of his right arm and slashed at a pair of shoulders. The shoulders moved quickly, Mueller felt the impact of steel on steel. Then the arm clothed in blue and red seemed to bu..t at the elbow, and drip, and the shoulders collapsed.

The Uhlan's leather helmet felt like molten brass. The sun penetrated his tunic, baked his back; sweat, pouring rapidly, mingled with the dust and tiny drops of acrid moisture formed on his mustache and found his tongue. He felt his horse being pushed out and away from the mêlée. Slash! Mueller aimed at a rider

but his saber went swinging through empty air, tearing at the muscles of his wrist. A miss. He deflected the point a bit and on the next lunge, it went deep into the neck of the Frenchman's horse. The Lancer pitched gently over his mount's head and fell to the road, where the whirling hoofs found him.

Something exploded behind Mueller and his scabbard banged against one thigh, rattling from the impact of a bullet. He unhooked the sheath and let it fall to the ground; a broken scabbard was in the way. Hacking, thrusting, parrying, he made his path to the edge of the road. There, screened by a bough, he paused to watch for a moment.

The Uhlans were outnumbered. Surprise had been their strength and they had lost it; three or four had fallen. Mueller shook his head. With a jerk he placed the whistle to his lips and blew hard and long. The French broke clear and galloped down the road in the direction they had first been heading. The turmoil of noise faded. A horse, stained with crimson, screamed from where it lay in the road and one of Mueller's troopers placed a carbine against its head. The shot was muffled. Mueller rose in his saddle, whistle again between his lips.

Far down the road, a Frenchman halted in the gallop and aimed over one shoulder. Mueller felt a riving pain in his side. He grunted softly and slumped, and Klaussen caught him as he fell from the horse.

The Uhlans, backs turned on their own dead, stood huddled in a circle about the fallen Mueller and gazed at him with unbelieving eyes, while the crimson seeped from the captain's side and mixed with the dust.

At last Stefan Mueller knew pain. There was dust in his eyes and he tried to wipe it away with one cuff. The cuff went back and forth across his face until Klaussen held his arm and pinioned it to the earth. Mueller cursed him. He attempted to raise the other arm; it refused to move and gradually it occurred to him that it would be a long time before he would regain the use of it. The pain in his side throbbed and beat like a tocsin—the war tocsin, he thought. Mueller turned his cheek to the ground and sobbed in rage; the dust left his eyes, washed away by tears. The troopers stood stolidly about him.

Klaussen beckoned to two of them and, leaning over, they raised Mueller like a child and placed him in the saddle. One threw a blanket about the captain's shoulders; Mueller's cape was lying on the highway, torn and stained. They led him away, two arms supporting him in the creaking leather. Klaussen stood in the middle of the road, the sun painting his hair a deep yellow, and sobbed. A corporal walked to the grass, stared at a dead French Lancer, cursed, rejoined his companions. Silence enfolded the little knot of men.

THE FIELD hospital was cold and smelled of sodden, dirty uniforms. Mueller was placed in one corner on a blanket, where he gazed upward at the holes in the roof, for the hospital was a farmhouse, and it had been shelled that morning. Mueller's stare was fixed on a swinging shingle that seemed suspended from the roof with no visible support; he wondered if it would fall on his body before they took him away. But the invisible wire held, and the shingle spun slowly, aggravatingly, in the faint breeze of the fading day.

Mueller reached under the blanket folds, already hard with blood, and groped for the wound with his right hand —his left was numb. He could not find it. In his mind, he pictured a bullet hole, clean and fresh, with a tiny purple ring around it. Most of the wounds he had seen were like that. A man spent perhaps a month in bed and then was up again, refreshed from the rest.

Yes, about a month. That was not long. For the first time since the bullet seared him, Mueller felt calm; there was room in his rugged body for more than one bit of lead. Let the weeks pass quickly,

please God, and again he would take the saddle, beside the walls of Paris.

The doctor leaned over, drew down the blanket, and the Uhlan felt the icy pain of water and antiseptic, the pull on his uniform as the cloth was cut away. The *snip-snip* of the doctor's scissors irritated him. Why didn't the man lift the tunic off and get to the wound direct? Why was there so much cutting and tugging? The pain was intense and he fastened his eyes to the roof again. The doctor shook his head.

"Bad hole there, Herr Hauptmann. I will do my best." His tongue went *tchk-tchk* in his cheek.

Mueller ground his jaws, ashamed of the throb in his throat. Pain was good for one, he said to himself grimly. Then he fainted, for a great deal of blood had seeped from that hole in his side.

THE TRAIN jolted and shook Mueller, but he only grumbled mildly. The window at his elbow allowed him a view of the country; they were passing through the lowlands. Thatched cottages passed by silently; poplars grew beside the canals and swayed in the breeze. The flapping of a stork's wings caught Mueller's eye and he followed the bird until the car window cut off his sight. How restful it all was, he reflected. Yet the poor people who lived in this country would never know the thrill of battle, the smell of high explosive, the feel of a cavalry horse between one's legs.

They were doomed to huddle in their cottages, raise their crops for the commissary men, hear of the war only from the newspapers, or when a cripple limped up the lane and, taking a seat by the doorway, talked to the children of the valiant deeds being performed to the north, beyond the green horizon. It was all part, Mueller knew, of the great scheme, yet he silently gave thanks that his rôle had been cast in the field. Fleetingly, he thought of his horse and saddle, and his nostrils quivered.

How quiet and clean it was in the train! How softly the sisters threaded their way from car to car on the rubber carpeted aisles; what a martial noise the wheels made as they click-clacked over the metals. Like the roll of the snare drum, the tramp of hob-nailed boots. It was worth a trifling wound to see and feel all this. The swaying of the roadbed gradually rocked him to sleep.

The hospital near Hamburg was cold, too, but it smelled nicely—of ether, of lint, of scrubbed linoleum. Mueller's bed was near a window and the breeze swept in from the meadows, bringing the tang of the salt marsh along the Elbe.

On his third day, they let him sit up. He was surprised to find how little the wound hurt. He remembered the field doctor had gone *tchk-tchk* at the first dressing; but that was the way of all medical men. They shook their heads gloomily and the patient got well. Perhaps it made the doctors feel better to glower and grumble. If they found any pleasure in it, they were welcome, Mueller decided. As for himself, he preferred to be a soldier.

At the end of the first week, he was allowed to sit in a rolling chair on the wide porches and feel the warmth of the sun. He liked it. Although Mueller thought the white bed gown they made him wear was womanish, he drew great satisfaction from patting the blanket wrapped about his legs. The blanket was gray-green and reminded him of his uniform.

A pink faced, rotund little man approached and drew up a chair alongside of Mueller. He sat down stiffly as though afraid of rumpling his tunic, which bore on the collar the insignia of a medical adjutant.

"Good morning," he said.

"Good morning," Mueller replied.

The other instantly broke into chatter about the weather, the hospital, the glorious news from France, the coming victory.

What does the fellow want? Mueller pondered. He interrupted the stream of words.

"And you had a message for me?" he queried, immediately realizing he had bared the purpose of the visit.

"Why, yes, Herr Kapitan," the fat one chirped, "now that you remind me." He turned his head away and stared out over the green of the grass. "You know, do you not, that you will never be able to ride again?"

Mueller had not known and his chest grew tight. For a moment he doubted; then he looked into the other's eyes. It was true. A mad caravan of thoughts took shape and tumbled through his mind. Never to ride again. Never to— But it was horrible! Four years in the barracks staked against one day on a dusty highway in France. He had lost. He would never see his troop again; his horse would be taken. Klaussen would vanish in a thunder of hoofs; the saber would hang from a wall peg until the strap broke; the leather helmet would crack and fall apart. And his uniform? What would they do with that? They must let him keep it! He would never let it go. He would—

"Of course, you know," the chirping doctor continued, "that you will still be able to render service to the Fatherland. I have looked over your papers and have recommended to the board that you be transferred to the infantry. Your wound will be no handicap there. Remember, Herr Kapitan, it is the infantry that is doing glorious things in France now."

For the second time, Mueller felt the tremor in his chest. It was closer the heart now. The infantry! Good fellows, but they should be kept to the rear of the cavalry. He liked to think of them as plodders; great, broad men who marched slowly, methodically until a trench or shrapnel broke their ranks. There was no color there, none of the wine of war. He would have to forget everything he had learned; begin all over again. His body alone would be unchanged, he thought; then he remembered his wound and cursed harshly. The infantry!

Cap for helmet, rifle for saber, knapsack for belt, shoes for boots. Stefan Mueller would become a cog in the great scheme, like the farmers whose thatched cottages he had glimpsed from the hospital train. He would fight on foot in a mire of mud, and there would be no saddle on which to rest one's head at night. For all he would care, the lances could rot in a corner like the flags of a lost regiment. And trenches stank. Bah! The infantry . . .

From a distance the words came to him.

"So you will report at concentration camp on the 18th. Everything will be taken care of—papers are all drawn—rank to remain same—good luck."

The chirper backed away.

Mueller's wound began to throb. The veins in his head pounded until he gripped the sides of the rolling chair and trembled. The warmth was gone from the sun, the taste from his cigaret. The nurse came to get him and he stared at her with hard, brooding eyes. What did that simple woman know about soldiers? Had she ever seen a Uhlan? Of course not! Had she ever seen the black streamer flying stiff and straight from a lance? Ridiculous! Did she know the difference between a plodder and a rider? Certainly not! Mueller snarled and muttered beneath his breath until the orderly came. They rolled him into bed and he lay there, as black as the pennon he loved. The supper tray fell from his knees to the floor. A push on the bell above his head would have brought some one, but he forced his hand to lie still. No hospital could help him. The infantry!

MUELLER, a little gray, a little of the blue worn from his eyes, went into the trenches opposite Ferville in April, 1915. He had lost weight in the hospital and the tan had fled his skin; but his muscles were still hard and the dictates of fate grew light with time. If he could not ride, he could march; and a sword at his belt still meant command. He had merely changed paths of duty.

For the first time in his life, Mueller found himself grateful to the engineers—

they had built the dugout in which he was to live. A marvelous thing, this dugout, with concrete roof, steel supports, wooden floor, slanting entrance. There were even electric lights and telephone. Ferville was a quiet sector.

Schlosser had the cot next to his—a pleasant fellow who had been studying medicine in Berlin when the tempest broke. Mueller talked with him, ate with him, even shared his tobacco. The wound in Mueller's side had healed and he thought seldom of it. He tried to forget the Uhlans; they were doomed when Joffre's taxicab army rattled from Paris to the Marne. Klaussen was killed at Charleroi. The rest of the patrol had been absorbed. High explosive began to embroider a lasting pattern on the soil of France. Wobbling planes took to the air. Perhaps it was all for the best, Mueller reflected—and he was still a soldier.

He lived through his first raid and enjoyed it. When the prisoners came back, he was surprised to see them well clothed, well fed, ruddy. He compared them with his own men and found them fit. Excellent foemen, they were. If the war was to be fought from holes in the ground, the foxes should be fat.

In time, Mueller came to consider the infantry the backbone of the army. At nights he would borrow Schlosser's field manual and pore over the pages in the glow from the squat bulb above his cot. He gradually forgot the saber. The nearest lance was a hundred miles away. Klaussen was buried.

One day, he turned to Schlosser.

"You, my friend," he said, "enjoy this fighting from cover?"

The other nodded.

"Yes, it is best. In the field, it is too easy to kill a man. Here, in this trench, we protect ourselves. A thousand bullets may cost but one body. We are here to live, not die."

Mueller agreed readily. Yes, it was best. He thought of a French road under the hot August sun. In ten minutes, there were twelve dead, gray-green and scarlet. The rubbish of war. He wondered if the trees there were still powdered and whitened with dust.

The next night Mueller led twenty men through his own wire. He let them go through five at a time, between flares. There was no noise, no clatter. He had determined that this raid should be a model for others. To his mind, a raid was an opportunity to display mechanical efficiency. That was what made the infantry so essential; they fought by rule and manual theory, yielding no place in their plans for miscalculation. He dropped on his stomach and began the long crawl across three hundred yards of filth.

Twenty minutes later he rubbed his hands together in the darkness. His plan had not miscarried. He had effectually blocked off a small segment of the French trench, entered it with a minimum of casualties, extracted the maximum of prisoners. Now he lay in a shell hole and listened while the air above him murmured at the passage of bullets. There was little to fear from the artillery; the bursts were too scattered. He spoke in a low voice and a sergeant crawled toward him through the gloom, eyes fastened to the pale of Mueller's face.

"We will stay here until this—" Mueller gestured to the storm of steel overhead—"has subsided. Then we go back, five at a time. Remember, no more than five. I will lead; you will come in last."

The sergeant crawled away, the rustle of his uniform sounding like the whisper of a frightened child. Mueller blew breath on his hands; they were cold and stiff.

A hundred feet away, a Frenchman stood face to the parapet, spread his legs apart and described a great arc with his right hand. The grenade turned slowly in the air, yellow flame burning the powder channel inside, hidden beneath a checkered outer shell of iron. Mueller did not hear. The blast swept his helmet away and he felt a stabbing pain in the leg, then a strange flowing warmth. As the sergeant reached his side, Mueller fainted for the second time in his life. The

men went back to the wire five at a time, except for the first group. They were carrying their leader among them.

For three days, Mueller tossed on a fiery bed and cursed the sting of high explosive. On the fourth day, the pain crept from the ankle to the knee and they kept his head flat to the pillow so that he could not see the covers. There was only one leg now. And then three men in long green cloaks stood beside his cot and read from a crinkly square of paper, while heads were raised from other beds and pain burned eyes looked on with pride. Mueller only heard a word here and there. When the visitors went away, they left behind them, pinned to Mueller's coverlet, a bit of metal slipped on a ribbon of black and white. Mueller caressed it with his hands and placed it beneath the pillow when he closed his eyes.

But in another great room of the hospital was a queer harness of wood and leather. It fitted him, for they had measured him while he slept—while he slept, for no one cared to tell him the truth.

Four months later, when Mueller was discharged from the hospital, he had learned to use the new leg well. The harness was stiff at first, but became pliant gradually. A medical major escorted him to the front entrance, where a military car stood with engine running.

"Well, Captain—" the major smiled—"I guess it is home and quiet for you now, eh?"

Mueller, tall and pale, stood for a moment brooding; the major, of course, could not know there was neither home nor quiet waiting for him, anywhere. Then he straightened his shoulders.

"No," he replied, "there is still work I can do."

THE FIRST day in the munitions factory, Mueller was astonished by the mass of machinery. A great, red haired man walked down a long aisle between whirring drums of metal and placed Mueller at a lathe, where a cold trickle of milky water hid the point of the cutting tool. A hand truck appeared from the gloom and the red haired man took from the carriage a dull cylinder of metal and caught it up between the points of the lathe. While Mueller stood at his shoulder, the foreman fed the cylinder across the tool edge and long curly shavings of steel fell to a trough below, where they were gathered every half hour. Mueller slowly grew used to the warm smell of metal biting metal.

When midnight came, the red haired man went away and left Mueller with the lathe, the tool, and the milky water, which he tried to use in proper sequence. He spoiled only three cylinders the first night, so they gave him a badge and a number and told him to come to work on C shift.

Mueller gradually lost track of time; days drifted into other days, nights into nights, until he ceased to think of light and darkness except as minor changes in an endless pattern of hours. He became like the machine he operated, hard and ungiving, except when the stump of his leg hurt. Then he would pause and rest, easing the harness of leather and wood, until the red haired man appeared, which was the signal for instant absorption in work. The foreman made it disagreeable for those who rested at their labors. The lathe to Mueller's left was run by a woman, who sniffled persistently, and behind her, at a long table, was Zachowski, the Pole, who measured every cylinder with calipers. If Zachowski frowned suddenly, Mueller knew the cylinder was improperly cut and waited patiently until it was handed back to himself, or the woman. Zachowski was a sharp inspector.

Each midnight a gong rang harshly and the machines all stopped as if by magic. The quiet came down quickly and often found Mueller unprepared. Zachowski, however, was always ready for the midnight halt; he would reach instantly under his table and pull forth a package of food. Mueller kept his lunch in his tool chest. The woman walked

away to eat with her own sex in a corner of the huge shop. Zachowski's diet never varied. He ate great quantities of bread and sausage. Mueller tried to vary his own food but he found the prices an obstacle, so he gradually accepted Zachowski's example. The bread was hard, the sausage bitter, but they were filling.

Zachowski, at times, had an irritating manner of talking. On Mueller's second night in the factory, the Pole sat by one end of the long table, his lunch spread amid the steel shells, and stared at the grease stained floor.

"So you started as a soldier, eh?" he commenced. Mueller nodded. "A fine life, a soldier's," Zachowski continued in a placating voice. "You liked it, *hein?*"

Mueller again nodded assent. Zachowski pointed to the wooden leg.

"But you got that?"

Muller admitted he had.

"Well, well; you were not so smart after all. We, here—" the Pole motioned to the shop with a wide hand—"have been at this job for nearly three years. The hours are not bad, the money good, the work simple. We would—"

"Yes, my friend," Mueller interrupted, "but you get no thrill. You work at your machines all night, sleep all day. You do not know the exultation of battle, the love of the Fatherland."

He rubbed his hand across his chest where, beneath the oily shirt, a bit of white and black ribbon lay.

"Ho-ho!" Zachowski laughed. "The exultation of battle, my friend? The dirt, the filth, the blood, you mean! The sharp song of bullets, the roar of shells like these." He patted the steel cylinders by his leg. "Ho-ho! We want none of that. Give me my calipers and my hands, and I ask nothing else."

Mueller was angered, yet confused. He had never heard such crawling, creeping words before; it was a shock, and he wanted time to think. He turned his back on Zachowski and fussed with the lathe, as if there were something out of order. But the perfection of the steel seemed to mock him, its polished surface gleamed defiantly, challenging him. For a moment, Mueller thought of his leg. Then the gong rang and the whir started all over again. The sniffling woman returned to her machine and Zachowski reached for his calipers.

"Ho-ho—!"

MUELLER grew to love the great cylinders of stub nosed steel. They spun majestically and gave up their surfaces to the sharp tool without protest. He would watch the long shavings go curling down and down until they reached the trough and broke, the smell of the blued metal tickling his nose. The white water washed over his hands and the skin grew tough and seamed; he threw away his gloves. He made fewer and fewer mistakes until finally, one night, Zachowski passed every shell.

Mueller's chest swelled. The saber and the pennon had fled his memory; the gray-green tunic had been transformed into the dirt and grease of his heavy shirt. His hair—the hair that had become suddenly flecked with gray—grew long; so long that a helmet would not have covered it.

His cheek bones protruded. His fingers were blunt and scarred and he realized they could not wrap themselves around a weapon; they were only fit to handle the steel of the lathe. The whir of the machines deadened his senses; the bread and sausage dulled his stomach. Yet every cylinder was another shell for the army, he repeated to himself constantly, and he took a savage interest in his nightly output. More and more and more, the army needed. It was only the war that mattered; not how he toiled to do his share.

He talked as little as possible with Zachowski. The other's sarcasm angered him, his biting words confused him, corroded the even temper of his mind. Mueller wanted to be let alone. He ate his midnight lunch by himself.

Once, however, Zachowski touched him

on the shoulder; the red haired man was not in sight.

"Hey, you," the Pole said, glaring into Mueller's eyes, "what are you trying to do? There are others working here. You do not have to supply the army by yourself. Look!" He pointed to his table where Mueller's shells were piled up. "You work too fast to suit me. Go more slowly."

Mueller did not reply; he was shaking with anger. A dull red surge pounded upward and lodged in his throat, and he made no effort to still the turmoil of emotions. He turned back to his work, trembling, and fed another cylinder to the lathe. Ah, if there was only some other work he could do, some other way for a cripple to serve the army. He would break the Pole over his knees! But he must hold to this job—it was for the army. His gnarled fingers unclenched, the lathe whirred. How could any one expect a workman to understand?

Zachowski—sly, cowardly dog—had been no closer to the war than the narrow gap between the shining points of his calipers. His nostrils had never quivered to the sour tang of burned powder, the smell of a hot muzzle. He, Mueller, had not been afraid to give his blood and bone to the army. They had taken one leg and now they could have the rest, here in a dirty, greasy munitions factory. The sense of sacrifice was recompense enough. It was quite simple; the Pole did not understand.

Work was glory, Mueller reflected. The munitions plant was a reserve trench, filled with supplies for a glorious army. He liked that particular thought—considered explaining it to the Pole. A reserve trench! Yes, that was good. Then suddenly, while his thoughts were roving, Mueller's foot slipped in the grease, the harness became loose and he went crashing to the concrete floor.

The stump of his leg burned with a white, flaming agony; he had never known before that pain could be so intense, so finely excruciating. Great beads of moisture stood out on his weakened body, his scarred hands opened and closed convulsively like the gills of a fish, the breath rumbled deep in his chest, where it fought for space with the contracting muscles. His body was now not that of barrack days.

From out of the haze Mueller heard the sound of running feet and then a pair of arms reached under his shoulders. He forced his eyes upward and stared—the sniffling woman had come to help him. Other workers crossed the aisle to watch with stolid eyes, and were ordered back by the red haired man, who had suddenly appeared, tall and harsh. Mueller, in his pain, looked for Zachowski. As if from a great distance, he saw the inspector's eyes across the top of the table. Hard and unfeeling, they were, and Mueller thought, for a moment, that he saw a sneer.

A young doctor in a white coat knelt by Mueller's side and gazed at the bruised stump of a leg, where a scarlet stain was seeping into the texture of the trousers. He touched the throb with a gentle cloth but Mueller groaned, the hoarse cry reaching the ears of others, who shuddered at the sound and grew intent on their work. The voice of the red haired man boomed.

"Take him away, Herr Doktor. You need help, yes?"

While they were lifting him on to the blanket, Mueller heard Zachowski's voice. What was the man saying?

"Yes, sir, we can get along without Mueller. A poor workman—cripple, you know. And makes too many mistakes. A change will be better." The foreman nodded, understandingly.

Floating mist crept over Mueller's eyes, a gray-green mist, and another pain entered his body, near the heart, where the Pole had knifed him. It hurt and throbbed, though it was only of the mind. He repeated the words dully to himself.

"A poor workman, you know . . ."

And they were accepting the Pole's statement, without question! Mueller tried to collect his thoughts, stupidly; he would tell the truth for every one to hear.

But he could not form the words; his lips were tight and his tongue glued.

"He makes too many mistakes," Zachowski had said.

Ah, they could not believe that! He thought of the chart beside his lathe where he kept the figures. Let them look at that; let them read the totals. The red haired man must know! Mueller attempted to raise his arm, the saber arm, and point with it, but the limp muscles crumpled. As the arm fell, the pain grew more intense—the pain near the heart; the other he did not mind. For he was a good workman, the best in the plant—and a soldier.

He made no mistakes! Ask Zachowski! He will tell you he never uses the calipers on my shells. They are perfect; the army needs them. Give them more and more shells!

Klaussen, where are you? Tell these fools what I have done. Of my broken ribs, my lost leg. I am a soldier. Tell them, Klaussen! They are French Lancers, riding hard. Mount! The horses first. Charge—!

The young doctor took one corner of the blanket and placed it over Mueller's mouth to muffle the words. There would be no work done with this raving man on the floor. What was it he was saying, anyway?

"Mount!" "Charge!" The delirium of pain.

The red haired man motioned the stretcher bearers down the aisle, himself walking ahead of the burden so that the workers on either side would not raise their eyes. At the long table Zachowski picked up his calipers and reached for another shell and, as he did so, a trickle of white water sloshed from Mueller's lathe and found its way to the floor, where it washed away a red stain. The Pole thought to himself:

"The fool is gone. The army and the Fatherland. Ho-ho! What trash! I hope the man who takes Mueller's place is a sensible fellow like myself. Who wants to be a soldier? Who wants to fight? Until—until the revolution!"

MUELLER left the dispensary the next day with a pair of crutches beneath his arms and a piece of clean, crisp paper in one pocket. He did not mind the crutches—he had used them before. But the paper puzzled him. It stated quite tersely that Stefan Mueller was discharged of all duties for one month. At the end of that time, he was to report for medical examination and if found fit, would return to work. He took the paper from his pocket, turned it over and over in his hand. Was there nothing else said? Surely they had forgotten something.

His leg hurt frightfully, it was true, but there must be some task he could perform. On all sides was the cry for men, more men; only the dead and the hopelessly maimed were not working. But the little piece of paper said nothing. What was he to do for a month? His two arms—the muscles swelled as he gripped the crutches—were good for something. And his legs—he could stand on the ill mated two, the doctor said, for a few hours at a time. Yet in the day of need, he bitterly reflected, his country did not call on him—want him.

Mueller stood by the entrance to the factory and sucked great gulps of the tingling air into his chest. The warmth was gone from the sun—it was October—but the air was good. At least a man with one leg could breathe deeply. While he stood motionless, a voice hailed him. He turned to the speaker—a sallow, crumpled man without arms who sat against the brick wall and balanced a newspaper on his knees.

"So, comrade, they let you out?" said the other, and smiled grimly. "I, too, was let out. What can a man do with only his legs, they asked me."

Mueller glanced down at his crutches.

"Yes," he admitted, "I am out. What can a man do with only his arms, they asked me. I am eager to work—anything at all, I begged them. The war must be won, friend. If only—"

"*Tchk-tchk*, comrade. Forget the war. It has only brought sorrow to you and

me. For myself, I will sit here in the sun until it is over. And you will join me before long. To hell with the war!"

Mueller snorted and hobbled away, too tired to argue. What was the matter with these people? Zachowski and the rest of them? The war would never be won by them, or with their help. Content to sit in the sun or work half heartedly in a factory until all was over, without a thought to those glorious fellows who were fighting for them in the north. With a poignant throb, he suddenly longed for the old days when a man who dared raise his voice was met with the punishment he deserved. Mueller's breath came harshly. Those were days! Four years in the gray, cold barracks where they made machines. Four years with the smell of horse and saddle in one's nostrils. The lance and the black pennon. The gray-green that clothed them. *Ach*, that was living!

Nevertheless, Mueller took to sitting in the sun with the armless man. He had to, for there was neither home nor family to welcome him. And he frowned at the thought of a convalescent depot; they were filled to overflowing with shirkers in this, the fourth year of the war. Bread and sausage became a luxury to Mueller, and twice, he begged for money on the streets. The third time, he was rebuffed and he hobbled away, tears of anger springing to his eyes. He wiped his cheeks with a soiled cuff and sat by the wall, while the armless one laughed.

"See, my friend?" the other said. "It is not the war that counts nowadays. It is one's self. Food and money are what we want."

Mueller nodded his head—but he did not agree at all. War was still more important.

Early one morning, Mueller saw Zachowski leave the factory gate. He followed the man's retreating back with hard eyes. The armless one gestured toward the inspector.

"There goes a sly one," he commented. "Works here at night time and excites the workers by day. A wicked tongue, they tell me—and a Red. He wants them to strike. Revolution, they say—I don't know." He shrugged his shoulders.

"Why should they strike?" Mueller asked.

"So the war will end," the other replied. "No shells, no war, eh?"

Mueller thought for a moment to protest, but held his tongue. Down deep, he knew the armless man would not understand; would think Mueller held a petty grievance against the Pole.

THERE was the murmur of babbling voices down the street and Mueller glanced up from the warm earth beside him, saw a crowd of perhaps one hundred workmen assembled on the pavements. They were moving slowly toward the plant and at one side, skulking near the shadow of the houses, was Zachowski, urging the rabble on with fierce gestures and a fiery tongue. Loud and demanding, the voices of the crowd came to Mueller's ears.

"What is it?" he asked his companion. The other spat carefully.

"It is Zachowski—the communist," he said. "He has started them at last."

The rumble of the mob grew until it sounded like the roar of an angered sea, the hoarse cries breaking against the walls, clacking back and forth across the narrow street in growing echoes. Mueller saw other workmen, by ones and twos, come running from side streets to join the crowd, until soon there were two hundred on the march. Then, without warning, the great gates of the factory closed at Mueller's back with a deep throated clang. Some one inside the walls had seen.

Mueller rose slowly to his feet and glanced at the front ranks of the approaching throng. The armless man scuttled away, silently.

And Zachowski, too, moved furtively. The rumble of the gates had warned him; even at the moment, he knew, telephones were whining the call for help. Not far away, troops were assembling on the cobbles before a huge gray building,

rifles were being loaded. The Pole paused and let the mob roar past. Then he withdrew to a doorway, vanished inside after one quick glance down the street. The rabble swept by, forged ahead; they needed no leader now. From behind a heavy shutter, Zachowski watched with flaming eyes and panting lips, as a fox in his lair watches the baffled hounds. He could await another day, when the great gates of the factory were open.

Mueller saw only the dark faces and the twisted mouths of the mob pressing close to him. He stood before the closed gates and leaned on his crutches, with a face that was white—chalk-white. A giant workman towered before him.

"Out of my way, man," the giant said, and raised one arm; but Mueller stood, rooted, the crutches trembling in his hands. The October sun had gone behind a cloud and everything was harsh and gray.

"What do you want?" Mueller asked, surprised to find his voice failing. It was high and squeaky, like a frightened child's. Come, he must be more commanding! If he only had a lance—or a saber. Then he would show them! But Mueller forgot he had had no food for two days, and that an empty stomach breeds delirium. He leaned on one crutch and held the other hand high.

"Stop, you fools!" he screamed. "There is nothing here you want. Only supplies for our glorious soldiers. Let them—"

A cry of derision drowned his words. The big workman placed one hand on Mueller's shoulder and spun him around.

"It is you who are a fool. Get out of my way!"

Far down the street, Mueller heard the clatter of hobnailed boots. Soldiers! A tremor of exultation shook him. They would run these dogs of workmen like chaff before the wind. Let the mob get a touch of steel, let them hear the rattle of bullets. Then would they know what is war.

But the mob already was running and half of the men had vanished. Mueller stood triumphant, while the scarlet flecks returned to his eyes and whirled before his vision. This was living! Mount, my good Klaussen! Down where the trees are white with dust. Under a burning August sun. Horses first—charge!

A pale youth in an ill fitting uniform set up the machine gun at the street corner. The army had snatched him from the class room a month before and he was afraid—afraid of the steel barrel which swung cold and black before his chin. But the breech was open and the cartridge studded belt ready. The one eyed officer at the youth's shoulder spoke from the scar in his face that served as a mouth.

"Fire!"

A trembling finger pressed the trigger.

Mueller saw the orange flame at the muzzle and with it, the sensation of life ripped out of him. The chatter of the gun reverberated from the house fronts, long tatters of smoke whipped the air, bullets spattered the gate behind where Mueller lay. The trembling finger withdrew the pressure. An awful silence came.

Mueller's body lay face downward between two others; one the huge hulk of the workman who had raised an arm. The soldiers rolled Mueller over and the oil stained shirt burst open. There on his chest was a grimed bit of black and white ribbon. The war bitten officer grunted.

"The dog wears a cross," he said, and kicked the prostrate form. "Wonder where he found it?"

A Story of Forgotten Men and the Primitive Code of the Jungle

MAN POWER

By ROBERT CARSE

THEY stood at the edge of the jungle. For seventeen days they had been in it, since they had broken from their convict wood camp on the coast. In that time they had not seen, anywhere, the full light of the sun, or of the moon and stars.

Now before them the great, still jungle shadows were beset and dimmed by waves of light. Tree limbs, *lianas*, ferns and orchids stood out in stark, clear and colorful relief. And beyond that was a golden blaze of fire from the midday sun.

Here, within the edge of the jungle, the three of them had stopped for a time, almost afraid, now that they knew their goal was a reality and just beyond, to go on to it. They stood with their heads on their chests, their hands and limbs lax, their feet spread wide so that they would not topple and fall in their fevered weariness. They stood listening. Through the final barrier of brush and vast trees, the sounds of the mine came to them sharply. Deep in the steaming jungle depths they had heard the reiterant, compelling throb of the big pumps first. From then on they had fought toward it, buoyed by a new strength and reawakening of hope.

Now, swiftly, with darkly blazing eyes, they looked at one another, unwilling to wait any longer. Side by side and as if at some silent signal, they tore through the last green tangle of leaves and vines. Fiercely the sun hit them. They stood still. They were mute, and sick with the force of that shock; bewildered and almost frightened by it. Their crooked arms dropped slowly from before their eyes. They looked up, lifting their faces.

The place had been described to them first by an old *libéré*, a butterfly hunter. The man had worked here for a time. They had met him on the coast when he had come out from the jungle. It was he who had germinated in their brains the idea of escape and of coming here. His description, they saw now, had been a good one.

Ahead of them stretched a clearing of perhaps several acres. Here man had driven back and conquered the jungle and the forest. Trees and brush had been chopped and burned. The narrow, long

gash of the gorge was clear for all but four or five trees, those employed for the luxury of the shade they gave.

To one side, to the west, the defile of the gorge fell away to the river. There the headwaters of the small stream which led toward it had been dammed and backed up with walls of mud and green logs. Beside that dark, shallow body of water were the pumps and engines of the mine.

From the machines, in a great, heavy and black swerve of metal encased rubber, the pipeline ran toward the gravel cliff which was the far end of the gorge. From the narrow metal mouth of the pipeline, roaring with the pressure of the pumps, water lashed a white plumed tongue against the crumbling gravel of the gorge wall.

Down from it, the loosened flood washed back into long wooden sluice boxes, which ended in one great square of beams and

boards holding, they knew, the mercury for the gold. Men, almost a dozen of them, worked about the clearing, near the pumps and dam, about the sluice boxes and the piles of steaming gravel. They could see them, stooped over the white thrust of the pipeline stream, or with their shoulders lifting and falling rhythmically above their shovels and sifting screens.

"It is good." Tourdy, the youngest and strongest of the three spoke, a slow smile on the broad, heavy planes of his face. He lifted a wide thumb toward the working figures, the three small, tin roofed shacks in the center of the clearing. "Work, and a dry, clean place to sleep in."

Little, bandy legged Stregga barked in laughter beside him.

"Work!" he repeated. "The farmer wants work—after the prisons! There is food here, and rum; so that old guy, the *libéré*, said when he steered us on to this."

Daubignard, the third man, straightened his stooped shoulders inside his coarse canvas prison jumper. Already he had advanced a pace from the others. Now he looked back at them with grave yet almost amused eyes.

"You're both right. There's work, and food, and rum, and gold—gold which will buy a man out of this country. Gold which will get him away from the *paludismo*, the flies and the jungle. Anyhow, we're here. Now, look smart, you. Here is the guy who runs the place, the Dutchman."

They stood very still then, all of them, staring. From across the clearing one man had seen them and was advancing. He came slowly, it seemed to them, and very calmly. In that period of time before he stopped right in front of them, they were able to study him, readjust the reality of his presence and appearance with the mental symbol of him they had formed from what the old *libéré* and others had told them of this man.

He was tall, well over six feet. But his shoulders and chest inside his loosely buttoned flannel shirt suggested vast strength. He wore tight fitting khaki trousers stuffed into laced boots. As he came toward them they could see the flection and play of muscles under the thin fabric of his trousers. His face was cast in shadow by the wide brim of his double felt hat, which he wore in the manner of the Dutch planters across the Maroni. A heavy revolver bumped in an open topped holster low at his right hip. His broad belt was studded with cartridge clips. In his left hand, familiarly, he carried a Winchester carbine.

Perhaps ten paces in front of them, he stopped. He said nothing. He stood looking at them. Now they could see his face and his eyes. The face was square, but long; the lines of the chin tapered in a thin, untrained blond beard. He wore no mustache, and the firm, clean and almost hard lines of his mouth were fully visible. His eyes, in the shadow cast by the broad brim of the hat, seemed now opaquely dark. Later they were to discover that they were of an intense sharp blue.

Those eyes sought their eyes now, went from face to face. His silence, his utter immobility and calmness, destroyed what little calm they had brought to themselves. They were conscious of their bruised, bloody bare feet, their hair and beards, matted and dirtied by weeks in the unbroken jungle, of their torn prison clothing. On the breasts and trouser waistbands of that clothing their big, black prison serial numbers were printed in indelible ink. They had fled in those clothes. They had no others, nothing else but the rusty old machete Tourdy had bought from a river Indian three days from the coast.

It was Daubignard, the most sensitive, nervous and intelligent of the three, who spoke. He nodded his head, as if at an acquaintance in the street, thus trying to restore some of his lost confidence, bring himself on a level with this man before them.

"Good afternoon, M'sieur Von der Klaag," he said evenly.

The tall man did not stir. He let them stand for another full minute or so be-

fore he answered. Then his voice was harsh—

"What do you want?"

In Daubignard's veins the throb of rage beat, to meet with the aching, fiery drag of the malaria already there. Then he remembered, remembered what was behind them, and caught his lips over the words. Tourdy spoke, a slow and unconscious smile on his broad and round peasant's face:

"Work, m'sieur. Work here, at your mine."

The man whom Daubignard had addressed as Von der Klaag smiled. It was unpleasant.

"You're *relégués*, and escaped, hunted men. You're rotten with the fever. You're unfit for work. And the authorities would have you in two weeks, and have me for hiring you."

Tourdy smiled again, and held out his big, strong, calloused hands.

"We have built roads and chopped wood, endless wood, for the bosses on the coast. Done it with the fever in us, and without quinine and good food. You have food, and the pills; so they told us. The authorities do not come this far back. We know that, m'sieur, or we would not have come."

Once more that dark and cold glance passed over their bodies and faces.

"You think I will pay you for your work?"

Tourdy swung his head from side to side in a slow, pleasant, childish gesture.

"We have hoped so, m'sieur. We have been told, back on the coast, that you pay gold to the men who work it out for you. And you need men. All that gravel piled there, it is not sifted. Those two working there now, they are not enough. With me on the job, I would have that pile sifted in a day."

A laugh that was a small, unmusical sound came from the man called Von der Klaag.

"What is it they say I pay, those on the coast?"

"Five grams of gold a day, to the men who handle the pipeline; four, to those who handle the machines and pumps; three, to the shovel workers."

Von der Klaag nooded and jerked up the carbine in the crook of his elbow, so that he might thrust both his hands down over his wide leather belt. Slowly the harshly pronounced French words came to them.

"Prices have gone down. Your quotation may have been exact, months ago. I need men; there is work. But, for it, for men like you, I will pay two grams a day. No more."

The words came from Stregga in an impetuous rush—

"But m'sieur—"

Then he saw the expression of Von der Klaag's face, the gesture he made toward the jungle right behind them.

"That is my price. There is the jungle, where you came from. Take my price, or don't. To me it matters very little."

They spoke in unison, all of them, and in assent. A small and warm breeze sent its breath down across the clearing of the gorge toward them. With it came the smell of hot metal and oil, the sound of the noon whistle and the smell of frying meat. They had not, the swift mutual thought ran through their aching brains, eaten clean meat in months, or years . . .

Von der Klaag had already half turned from them. With a jerk of the blunt carbine muzzle he indicated the largest of the tin roofed shacks.

"That is the bunkhouse. You will find a place to sleep there. Maybe you can beg or borrow some food from those of your kind there until I advance it to you at the canteen tonight. Get along!"

They obeyed him, silently.

THERE were, they found, nine men besides themselves employed at the mine. Six of them were black, huge-and immensely strong bush negroes, Saramaccas, Bonis and Dojoekas, come for the most part from across the Maroni and Dutch Guiana. The other three were men like themselves, from the penal colony along the coast.

Those three were *libérés*, freed men, who had somehow lived through their actual prison sentences, and now were serving out their *doublage*, that period of time equal to the exact span of their sentences, which they must spend within the colony of French Guiana before they would be allowed to return to freedom.

They did not live in constant fear of betrayal or recapture by the authorities as the three newcomers did. They wore tattered, colorless cotton trousers and jean shirts, their regular prison uniforms long before discarded. But they were weak willed and nerveless men.

One, a small, entirely bald and toothless man, was a native Frenchmen, almost witless after twenty years of Guiana, forgetful of nearly everything except that he, in some manner, must live and gather together enough money to pay his passage back to France at the end of his *doublage*. The other two were strange types, even for Guiana. One was a broad, grinning black and ape-like man, a negro from the French island of Réunion, off the coast of Africa. He was a simple savage, with the instincts and mentality of a child, and hardly able to speak intelligible French. The third man was a lanky and half mad Berber, from the *bled* of the Middle Atlas, a former trooper of the Meharistes Saharien, the native African camel corps, sentenced to Guiana for striking a French sub-lieutenant while drunk and on duty.

From those three that noon Stregga and Daubignard borrowed a little food, coffee and water to keep them until night, when they might draw, against their forthcoming pay, supplies from the canteen of the Dutchman. Tourdy, unlike his two companions, was not content to sit in the sunlight against the wall of the bunkhouse, talking with the weird trio of *libérés*. After gulping down what little food Stregga shared out to him, he wandered off to examine the mine.

The other two were forgetful of him, talking with Rimon, the little, bald headed *libéré* and the other two about conditions here.

"How is this mug, Von der Klaag?" whispered Daubignard, down on his haunches in the welcome sun, a coarse black tobacco cigaret in his long fingers.

"A hard man, a slave driver," lisped Rimon through toothless gums. "No mercy. Works you until you fall; then curses you. They say his father had this place before him. Some mug from the colony, some convict, slid a knife into the elder Von der Klaag, and got off with quite a whack of gold. This lad has never forgotten it."

"Why haven't they tried it again," mumbled Stregga, "if he's like that?"

What seemed to be a smile passed over the old *libéré's* face.

"Try it! That rifle and revolver are as much a part of him as his two hands. And work's slack. Those blacks used to work at the Dutch bauxite mine, over in Moengo. That's closed down now, and they're here, taking what they can get. More would be here, if they could stand this lousy malaria."

A grunt came from Stregga; he half rose to his feet in a gesture of impatience and dislike—

"How much are you ahead, Rimon?"

"Fifteen grams."

"What?"

"Fifteen grams."

"How long have you been here?"

"Almost two years."

"*Sacre bleu!* And you can not do better than that?"

"No." That same wan smile of accepted defeat passed over the gray, bony frame of Rimon's face. "A man must eat to live, and the Dutchman asks two grams of gold for a can of condensed milk. You're lucky if you save out a gram of gold a month."

A low, soft, thoughtful whistle came from Daubignard. His deeply set, red rimmed eyes took in the clearing, the jungle, the dark chasm of the wide river behind them.

"I think we can fix that," he muttered.

Rimon swung his utterly bald head from side to side.

"Others have thought that. They are

not here now, Even the gold shipments are guarded; one, Vardon, a halfbreed from St. Laurent, a sort of partner and agent for this man, comes every three months with a picked canoe crew from the coast, and takes it out. No, this fellow has it all in hand— *Voilà!* The whistle. Now we work just a bit more."

They worked, those three, that afternoon, with pick and shovel and sifting screens. It seemed interminable, those hours, and the labor just beyond their feeble strength. And always near them, always watchful, was the Dutchman. But the good, clean food they had eaten at noon, the strong doses of quinine they had taken, were at work within them, helped them through.

Little gold birds and night doves began to call in the green, dark depths of the jungle. High in the limbs of the big wild cotton tree in the center of the clearing, the nests of small, black and gold casique birds became still for the night.

The whistle blew. The engines and pumps stopped, accentuating the still, cool quiet of the rapid dusk. An angular pattern of shadows struck out from the jungle, engulfing the clearing. Above the jungle, across the river and to the West, the sky was jonquil and a delicate mauve, then a soft silver, fretted and swiftly encompassed by absolute darkness.

Stars climbed, pale but clear. Kerosene lamps were yellow blossoms of light in the bunkhouse and the canteen shack, where Von der Klaag stood behind his strong hardwood counter, a lamp at his back on the shelf where his stores lay, his carbine at his elbow.

Toward him, stumbling in the darkness over the unfamiliar ground, the three new men came in a small, quiet, tense group. At the barrier of the counter they halted, side by side, gaping in, blinking a little in the glare of the kerosene lamp. The big man stood motionless and without word, waiting for them to speak, his account book open on the counter.

Stregga began:

"I will have, m'sieur, a tin of that chicken. Chicken, *n'est-ce pas?* And a tin of that English biscuit; a tin of that ham; coffee, a tin of condensed milk. And that in the bottle—rum? A bottle of that, then. Ah! Name of a dog! Your shovels and picks make a man hungry, m'sieur!"

Von der Klaag did not smile, or speak. He reached behind him with a long arm and brought down three round tins: ham, biscuit, coffee. In the account book, with a coarse pencil, in large characters, he wrote down the sums for the articles, translating their prices into the currency of the place, grams of raw gold. Toward him the three craned, watching the inscription of those figures.

"Nine grams!" It was Stregga, his face darkly flushed with blood. "That is for all—for the chicken, and the coffee, and for the rum also?"

Quietly Von der Klaag pointed down at the three articles on the counter:

"It is for those three here. It is all that you can draw now. Next week, perhaps the end of this, you might get the others." His eyes met the little man's, passed on, to Daubignard's, to Tourdy's. "Let it be understood right now," he said swiftly, yet calmly. "I am the man who runs this place; you work for me. If you do not like my style, or my prices, go; I did not ask you here. Prices are high. This is the bush. These things are brought in by canoe from Laurent; it takes weeks on the river. Now, you, do you want these three things—or shall I put them back?"

Stregga, whose blood was more Italian than French, did not speak. He drew back from the counter a pace. His back and shoulders arched. His hands came up, the fingers bent. His eyes had the glow of hot embers. From each side, Daubignard's and Tourdy's hands fell upon him; the big, blond man behind the counter had just made a steady, sure movement toward the cocked carbine at his side.

"Yes, that will be all for him," said Daubignard, finding difficulty in the control of his own voice. "You may give me the chicken and the coffee, and a tin of biscuit. And you, Tourdy?"

"A bottle of quinine tablets. Some of those cigarets, some matches, and some of that dried fish there. But yes. He—Stregga, the name. It does not matter. Mine, Tourdy. His, Daubignard." His glance caught with Daubignard's. "You have him? Then I shall take the things."

One by one he bundled them into his arms, while, calmly at his side, the Dutchman wrote down their type and price in his account book. He did not look up as they turned away into the darkness, Daubignard still keeping a restraining arm on Stregga's taut shoulders. He was stooped in the same position, the lamp at his back, when they entered through the dirty scrap of mosquito netting over the doorway of the bunkhouse.

TO ONE side, in a corner, sat Rimon, the wild faced Berber and the Réunion Island negro. They had eaten already; an empty sardine tin and a small crust of bread alone remained as evidence of it. Beyond them, down the long, narrow shack, the bush negroes sat on the only furniture in the room, old packing cases made into chairs. They were grouped about a table made of the same materials. A dirty globed kerosene lamp, smirched with dead moths and insects, burned on the table, casting a lemon colored light on the moving faces and hands intent on the dirty cards there.

Rimon and the other two *libérés* sat on the dirt floor, in almost complete shadow. For a moment Stregga stood looking down at them, then at the broad, black backs of the bushmen seated at the table. When he had come through the door, he had taken his own share of the supplies from Tourdy. Now he shifted them under his left elbow, so that his right arm and hand were free.

His first gesture and shove sent a bushman from his box chair.

"I'll sit here," he said. "Afterward, maybe, I'll take a hand with you."

The man so deposed, a young Saramacca with gilt earrings and a bright red and white striped loincloth, raised his hands slowly toward his shoulders. Muscles rippled underneath the smooth, dark skin, weirdly bunching his decorative scarifications.

"Cross *rio*," he said in the bush *talki-talki*, "we fella chase *transporté* lak snake chase leetle bird. Chase 'em back prison, get good gold *gulders* for so do."

Stregga laughed at him. His right hand was clenched over the round top of the pound tin of coffee, lifted a bit from the slick table top.

"Good," he said. His voice was hoarse, mocking. "This is this side of the river. No gold money here for *transportés*, not for fellows like you."

His eyes took in the whole table as he spoke. The other figures were still, like massive carvings done heroically in black ivory. He pointed up to the little voodoo charm the young Saramacca wore about his throat on a cord, containing a bit of serpent skin, the caul of a new born child and a fragment of fish vertebrae, all mumbled over by the tribal witch doctor before their sale to the wearer.

"That charm's no good for this side of the river. French mugs make that bad luck. Don't forget it!"

He laughed again, and began industriously to open the coffee tin. Behind him, quietly, understanding now, Daubignard and Tourdy had stepped. Daubignard straightened his naturally tall body to its full height, lifted a hand in a commanding and dramatic gesture—

"Move over, you—"

Slowly, bit by bit, they moved. Daubignard turned on the box chair. He gestured to the mute trio of *libérés* still in their bare, dark corner.

"Come on!" he called. "Sit down here! We run this place now."

At ten o'clock the bushmen finished their crude card game. The cards were carefully piled in a corner, the lamp blown out. Men slid creaking into their bare, hard plank bunks. The room was in darkness, still but for the sharp little arpeggios of the insects that swarmed in

through the rotted patches of netting at the door and windows.

Daubignard sat alone at the table, bearded chin at rest on his cupped hands, eyes staring widely into the darkness. It was hot and unpleasant in here. The place stank of unwashed and half sick bodies, of stale food and sweaty clothing. Sleep, despite his weariness, he knew, would not be his for hours.

He rose noiselessly on his bare feet and went out through the door. A greenish gold fragment of moon was aloft above the clearing. Against it and across it, black and ragged swirls of small cloud drifted. Somewhere, far distant in the jungle, as he dropped down against the side of the shack, a jaguar screamed, and there was a nervous little rustle in the nests of the casique birds in the limbs of the wild cotton tree overhead.

Then once more there was stillness. He drew from his trousers pockets his newly acquired matches and cigarets. At the orange flare of the sulphur match a little nighthawk, squatted crosswise near him awaiting its insect prey, flew up and off, its wings swift and beautiful triangles of black velvet in the dim moon radiance.

He smiled at that and drew more deeply on his coarse cigaret. The light in the Dutchman's living shack was on, he saw. Big jalousies were across the windows. But, through them, broad bars of light were cast across the intervening gulf of darkness, to bring into relief the closed and heavily padlocked door of the little canteen building.

"Wise, this Dutchman," he whispered. "Got it all figured out."

His head went back against the cool, pleasant roughness of the boards. He half closed his eyes, thinking swiftly in retrospect, weighing and reweighing what had been done, and then what should be done.

It was for him to do the thinking, he told himself now. His connection with the other two men had been originally one of chance alone. They had been with him in the little convict woods camp down the river, and they had been the most healthy and forceful men there. They had been all right in the bush, too. But not here.

What he knew of their pasts, back in France, told him that. Tourdy had been a peasant farmer, up in the Aisne Valley district, near the scene of the old battles. He had sold, in a season of bad crops, his only and beloved horse to a more prosperous neighbor. The neighbor, a parsimonious and brutal man, had first underfed the horse, then beaten it, finally so killed it. Tourdy had met him in the little village café one day, heard from the man's own lips the story of the horse—and choked the owner to death in a fit of mad but not inexplicable rage.

Stregga's case was a somewhat parallel one in its small basis of really intelligent motivation. The little man was from the Maritime Alps section of southern France, had been mayor of a small village there, close to the Italo-French border. According to his own story, his Fascist leanings, as a man who was, after all, principally of Italian blood, had led him into trouble with the authorities and, eventually, here. But that, Daubignard knew, was untrue: the actual charge brought against Stregga had been one of smuggling over the border, misuse of his petty power as mayor of the town . . .

While, of the three, his own case had been the only one which had any true signs of genius and great daring. He, Jacques Jean Daubignard, for fifteen years had run and controlled the financial paper having the greatest circulation in metropolitan France. Through its financial advice columns he had swayed the opinions and directed the francs of hundreds of thousands of readers. Until half a dozen of the stocks he had heavily recommended had tottered and crashed, and the agents of the Surété had come calling at his house in Passy at four o'clock in the morning.

All of which brought him back here, and to the Dutchman. He, Daubignard, must move alone, think this thing out. Stregga and Tourdy were good men; anyhow, they recognized his superior in-

telligence, and would do what he told them. That thing, right now, was to get gold—a whole lot of it.

They had escaped from the confinement of the coast. For the time being, at least, they were safe from recapture. No one had particularly hindered their going; to the Arab guards in charge of the wood gang of which they had been members, their departure had meant three more rations to sell to passing Indians and jungle runners. If they died in the jungle, that was fine. If they sickened of its dangers and horrors, as many did, and came tottering back, they would be placed in solitary confinement on Ile Joseph, and that would be all right, too.

No guards, none of the intermittent searching parties, came this far upstream, or anywhere near it. It was too far, and too dangerous. There was enough of the fever, of snakes and danger on the more or less civilized coast as it was. No, from that angle it was all right. The thing, then, to be considered was the getting of gold, which would buy them their way out through Paramaribo and Venezuela to a steamer bound for Mexico or the United States.

And gold meant the Dutchman, Von der Klaag, that man in the shack right over there. And he was a tough one; Daubignard admitted that now. Six days a week at two grams a day meant that, with luck a man might have forty-eight, or fifty, grams at the end of a month. But, if that same man wanted to earn his pay, eat so he might work and dose himself against the wracking fever, he must buy from the Dutchman's canteen, and that took all but a few half grams of his monthly pay. Old Rimon had been here nearly two years now, and was nowhere close to his dim goal.

Daubignard's veined eyelids hooded down over his staring eyes. In his hard fingers he turned and returned the moist stub of his cigaret. Von der Klaag was a shrewd, courageous and intelligent man. According to reliable gossip in the worker's bunkhouse and throughout the Guianas, the man's father, who had found and started this mine, had become unduly friendly and trustful with an escaped French convict who in time had become his foreman and, in payment, murdered the elder Von der Klaag, and got away with a big shipment of gold.

Now the son was running things, and not as his father had. He exacted power from the jungle scum who came to work for him just as he exacted it from the turbines and pumps his father had brought, piece by piece, into this country by canoes from the coast. Won der Klaag, as an individual, was a machine as much as any man could make himself. What emotions, what feelings he himself possessed, he kept well hidden and reserved from the men who had the misfortune to work for him.

Not, muttered Daubignard aloud, that you could blame him. The man had learned his lesson bitterly. But that did not help Daubignard and his companions. That did not get them the gold they needed. There was small chance of robbing the man, holding up the mine, or the gold convoy on its way to the coast. The disposition of the shack the Dutchman lived in, what Rimon had said of the handling of the gold shipments, and the fact that, up until the present, none of those shipments had been molested, showed that.

No, there must be found another way. There was just one other way, and a very simple one. Von der Klaag did not pay enough gold to his workers; his cleverly balanced economic basis kept the men he hired only a scant gram or so a month ahead of their canteen accounts, kept them here in the feverish heart of the jungle, hard at work.

But, if there were to be a strike here at the mine . . . If the trained workers here, the only men for hundreds of miles, were slowly to slack at their toil, and then insist they would not do more unless paid more, the Dutchman would have to increase their dole of gold. It would take weeks, it would take months, and a great deal of expense and complete shutdown of the mine, to get another crew in here.

Daubignard stood erect. He ground his new cigaret underheel, careless now of the fact that it was less than half smoked. Von der Klaag was a hard, strong and intelligent man. But he had now met Daubignard. The major part of the crew, the negro bushmen, were already under his control. And tomorrow, or by the day after at the latest, this whole mine would be under that same control.

There was a smile on his thin lips as he moved through the soft, low vapors of the night mists and entered the door of the bunkhouse.

THE CLIMAX to it came three days later, almost before Daubignard was ready for it. He was leaning indolently on his shovel, beside the turbulence of the sluice box stream. Ahead of him, right under the outthrust of the water eaten cliff top, Ibrim, the Berber *libéré* and two of the bushmen stood about the pipe line nozzle. Their motions were slow, uncertain and careless also, as he had agreed with them that they should be. Behind him, the rest of the men toyed at their work, with slow and futile pokes of shovels and picks.

Sharply he heard the harsh thrust of Von der Klaag's boots over the loose gravel of the slope and turned, his bland smile ready. Von der Klaag had not shaved in days. There were dark and deep circles under his eyes. His skin, beneath the yellow stubble of the beard, was taut and blanched with malaria. Even as he advanced up the slight slope toward Daubignard, the Frenchman could see the nervous twitch of his hands about the carbine he carried at his hip.

"Come over here, you." He all but jabbed the muzzle of the Winchester against Daubignard's stomach. "I want to speak with you."

"With me, m'sieur?"

For answer the blunt, hard muzzle of the gun jarred against his ribs. A small, cold trace of fear came then, up into Daubignard's brain. Perhaps, he thought swiftly, he had underestimated this man, after all. His long shovel still in his hand, he moved ahead, as the Dutchman indicated, and down the slope, away from the other men. Behind them, all work stopped; every man was watching them, knowing now what was happening.

Von der Klaag's voice lashed harshly—

"What are you after?"

As he had imagined this scene, Daubignard had seen himself as calm, completely in command, able to smile and exchange witty, cynical repartee with his man. But now, for some reason, he spoke simply and without artifice:

"More pay—more gold. We are all decided on that. What work we have done in the last few days we think sufficient for the amount of pay you give us. More pay, a gram more a day a man, say, and we will do a correspondingly increased amount of work. But why have you picked on me, m'sieur? I am just one of twelve."

"Daubignard," said the man before him slowly, "you are an intelligent man, or were, before Guiana got you. You planned this thing—this holdout. No man has ever attempted it here before. It won't work; I tell you that now."

"Look—" with a shrug of his shoulder, the gaunt Frenchman indicated the gorge end where the trio composed of the Berber and the two big bushmen stood silently about the pipeline end—"that is very dangerous there. Any time now a slide may come; the whole top of the cliff may give away, and engulf us all as we work. It is dangerous work and we want more pay for it."

Von der Klaag did not reply for a time. His eyes raised to the cliff, and to the three men at the end of the pipeline. It was dangerous. After years of intermittent working, this placer deposit of alluvial gold was giving out. Already he had seen the signs. Ten days before, he had sent a shipment out through his agent. There would be one, perhaps two, more and then the mine would be through, and he would leave this place forever, let the jungle return to its

dominance. But, this impossible man here!

There was a hardly controlled fury in his words as he spoke, addressing himself to Daubignard:

"I run this place. Men who work here do as I say. If you do not like it, go. I did not ask you here. You awaken no sympathy in me, no understanding. A man of your type, a French convict who came here years ago and was befriended by my father—made his overseer, murdered him, and stole fifty thousand guilders in gold. That impoverished my mother and myself; the revenue from this mine was our sole support. Into it my father had put all he had, all the money from the sale of his plantations in Demerara.

That traitorous act broke short my career, brought me from the university and here, into the jungle and the fever, to deal with men like you. Now—go back to work—and work! You and your companions are escaped men. The governor at Cayenne is an acquaintance of mine. A note sent by me, through the next rubber man or anybody else bound downriver, would do the trick for you. Move!"

For a fraction of time only did Daubignard hesitate, balancing this man's power against his own power, almost willing to strike out now, to kill in the wild desperation of his spirit. But then he turned and went back to his work, silently. The power, he knew, was not his. Von der Klaag had him; Von der Klaag was the more powerful man.

Von der Klaag, too, it was apparent, was at the point of desperation, wracked by the fever, secretly hating and fearing the jungle perhaps even more than Daubignard.

Von der Klaag moved behind him. His voice struck like a whip. A cold frenzy of rage had brought color into his face and eyes, fury into his voice. The others, seeing Daubignard, worked in silent swiftness, once more greatly afraid of this man who held their wretched lives in his hand.

OVER the cobalt immensity of the sky, the flame bright disk of the sun passed in its broad, brilliant path. The gold birds and night doves began in the jungle. The monkeys were stilled. There was the boom and beat of frogs. The casique birds returned to their nests in the wild cotton tree. Night was coming. Yet they worked, all of them, somehow afraid to stop, for not yet had Von der Klaag made the usual signal that the whistle was to be blown.

Then, very suddenly, one of the bushmen working at the pipeline end sprang sidewise, yelled, and fell kicking, crying over and over:

"Snake! Snake!"

Without full realization of doing so, the others dropped their tools and came forward toward the man, where Ibrim and the other bushman working there already knelt. He was in an acute agony of pain, fear and nausea. One hand was clamped about his right ankle with a convulsed and rigid grip. When they tore it loose, they found the small and livid marks of the fangs.

At Von der Klaag's order they lifted him rapidly up and carried him back to the bunkhouse. The Dutchman joined them there several minutes later; in his hands he carried bandages and a little medical case.

"Stand back!" he commanded them. "Get away!"

Then he went to work, introducing a tourniquet above the knee to keep the poison from being pumped back to the heart, opening and cauterizing the wound, dressing it. The opiate he had given the man upon entering had relaxed him somewhat; he lay in the bunk rather quietly now while Von der Klaag worked at the wound.

Shadows came between him and the lantern. He lifted his head, curses ready for their obstruction of his sight. Then he saw that all of them, the eleven, were about him, in a ring which had slowly formed and tightened since he had given his attention to the wounded man.

He did not speak; he did not think that perhaps the formation of the ring had been an unconscious movement on their part. But recognition came coldly and rapidly into his brain that he was here, alone, his rifle a full yard from him, and that there were eleven of them, in this small space, and that he was a full fifty yards from his own shack, his supply of other weapons, and his treasure of gold.

With the speed he had gained in thousands of practise gestures, he brought the big Webley revolver into his right hand and level at his hip. He crouched a bit, and took one pace forward, sweeping out with his left hand for his carbine. He had it. He was safe. He laughed, and there was a small undernote of hysteria in the sound.

"You," he said hoarsely and slowly, "you! While I work over your wounded mate! Stand back out of here! Get away from me!"

From right to left, on a level with their stomachs, he moved the muzzle of the Webley. A mumble of words that had no coherence or unison but that was meant for expostulation came from them. He cursed them again, promising he would shoot, and they tripped over each other getting out the door.

For what was perhaps a minute he stood there, looking at them where they stood, huddled, frightened, silent. Then he swung on his heel and went back for his medicine case and excess bandages. The bushman was still in a half stupor, the thick curve of his lips parted, his convex face a purple-black color underneath the film of sweat there. Beside the man he left more of the snake antitoxin and opiate.

"I hope you live," he said strangely. "You were a good worker before the Frenchmen came."

With that he turned and went from the shack. The eleven stood much as they had before. But now Daubignard, seeing the flat little medical case he held under his arm, came impetuously forward a pace and called at him in a high, nervous voice:

"You can not leave a man, one of your workers, like that, Von der Klaag. He will die. You must—"

Then he saw the big man's face, and the flame of rage that swept into his eyes. He stopped, and started back toward the others, to submerge himself there, become indistinctly one of them. But even there Von der Klaag centered his rage and his words upon him, answering him directly:

"You tell me what I should and must do, son of a dog? You, who mutinied today? Go take care of him yourself. There is medicine there, all that I have to help him. He is your tool, your fellow, not mine. You claim to be intelligent—a man who knows a great deal. Cure him, then—swine!"

Daubignard did not answer. No word came from any of the others. From inside the bunkhouse thrust a fluttering, sobbing cry of agony. The wounded negro was beset by a fresh burst of pain that had pierced the thin veil of the opiate and found his nerve centers. He was in new and horrible agony.

Von der Klaag looked that way; looked toward the silent, gaping group of eleven, then toward his own shack. And in his brain starkly came forth the memory of those shadows against the lamplight as he had stood over the wounded man, and what had happened here, early this afternoon, with Daubignard and the others.

"Go and fix him!" he repeated. He went on toward his shack.

It was dark when he flung back his own door and entered, but he did not light the lamp and did not stay within any longer than was necessary to put down his medicine case in its correct place. A power whose origin he more than vaguely understood brought him back, outside the door of the shack again, and at last he seated himself on the little porch, his sweaty shoulder against a corner beam. The bushman's shrieks were regular and clear now. Through the throb of night sounds from the jungle he could hear them—could not help but hear them.

A rigidity came over his own body. A sweat broke out on him, clammy, steady.

He opened and shut his hands. Several times he rose, only in the end to sit down again. But then those agonized cries seemed to gain and gather volume and intensity, to claim all his brain, whirl and throb there until he shook and was giddy with a kind of palsy of fever.

It was more than he could stand. It was more than his overstrained will could control. He came again staggering to his feet, cursing himself, that screaming black man, the eleven, and the jungle. And as he came to his feet, rushed up the two small steps and swung in through his door, he heard one more thick, yet penetrant scream, and knew that now it was a scream of death.

He found the lamp, lighted it, slopping kerosene, smudging his fingers with the wick, jamming the globe on askew. He gaped about him, looking around the room, trying to find some way, something, which would give him an avenue of escape from this place, this torture of mind and nerves, which seemed now to be sending endless, inward moving, hot walls pressing against his brain.

Then he remembered, and moved almost at a run across the room. The tin trunk top clanged as he threw it back. Clothes, mildewed with the jungle damp, flickered past him, and on to the floor. But, at the bottom, there in its carefully canvas wrapped case, was his violin.

Many times before, in the earlier months and years, when the nostalgia of homesickness and the seeming terrific futility of all this life had come darkly upon him, the physical act of playing this instrument, of evoking music from it, had given him escape, relaxed, strengthened and saved him.

Now he brought it forth, turned and returned it in his hands, placed its smooth coolness against his throbbing forehead and cheek. With hands that he could not keep from trembling, he sought again in the trunk, finding the bow, the rosin, the little, hermetically sealed tin box in which he had replaced the strings after last using them. They were there; they were all right, still in condition.

"Thank the good Lord," he whispered, arranging them. "Thank God!"

He swayed as he rose to play, plucking with calloused and unfamiliar fingers at the strings and stops. But then the feeling of the thing, his once considerable command of it, resurged over him, and the first notes were sure, clear, fine. His eyes shut once more as the bow rose and fell; he was no longer in the heart of the Guianan jungle. He was no longer all alone, surrounded by savage and hating men. He was no longer in a place where life was a constant and terrible struggle, death a thing of brute agony. He was in his father's house in the Hague, and across the room from him, calmly smiling and content, sat his mother and his fiancée, just as they had been as he had played for them on the day before he sailed.

What he played he did not then clearly know, or did not care. It was Brahms, it was Kreisler, it was Schumann but, to him, it was really all of one piece, was opiate, escape and release. But then through that thin, glittering and fragile wall that he had raised about him, something broke, and he lowered the bow and violin, and stood very still, staring, listening . . .

A CURSE word came from him. The bow and violin clattered to the table, and his revolver was in his hand. Outside, through the door screening, he had seen the silent and still figures of three men, standing right at the foot of the steps—Daubignard, Stregga and Tourdy.

He kicked back the door with his foot. They jumped, and nervously lifted their hands, started backing from the shack.

"Stop!" He brought down the muzzle of the gun. "What in hell were you doing here?"

They looked at one another, their faces and eyes vague with emotions that arose and confused swiftly. Stregga gained coherence first:

"The—the violin." It was a whisper

barely heard. "We came to listen, after having been in that place, with what is there. We, we have not heard anything like that for long years, m'sieur. We did not know you were like that. We had almost forgotten there were such things. And you—"

But he laughed then, and Stregga stopped.

"That is," he said swiftly and harshly, "the same kind of thing the other mug told my father. Get out of here—and if you come that close again, I shoot! *Dépêchez, alors!*"

A sound that was half curse, half growl, came from Stregga. His body tautened, and his arms raised and came forward, fingers crooked like claws. But then the other two were upon him, choking back the words outpouring between his chattering teeth, holding him down, dragging him away.

Standing there, Von der Klaag watched them until the wan sprawl of the bunkhouse light fell athwart their bodies. But they did not enter into that place. From inside it came the mumbled and throaty diapason of the *Jumbe* death chant, the thin and vaguely evil quaver of a reed flute. Djoeka, Saramacca and Boni were seeing the one brought to death by the snake and the white man's bad magic on his way. Against the wall of the hut, already crouched down, sat Rimon, the Berber and the Réunion man. The trio joined them there, in utter silence.

Von der Klaag laughed then, at himself and them.

"If you were men," he whispered, going in through his own door, "if you had shown any signs of it before, I might have been tempted to believe you."

Steadily and quietly he set to work to unstring and put away the violin.

At dawn, when he came for them, the Winchester in the crook of his right arm, his after breakfast pipe firmly between his teeth, he saw that during the night they had buried the dead man at the foot of the wild cotton tree. The thought of that man and his death aroused no emotion beyond that of anger in him now; the act was already of the past, a thing that could not now in any way be helped.

He drove them that day as he would have driven animals. They worked as such, without word, not even speaking among themselves. He smiled as he strode from place to place, watching the work, directing it; they understood him now, and his power!

Between three and four o'clock, the main centrifugal pump clanged, jarred and then stopped. At once he understood what it was. The bushman stationed over it had forgotten to oil it: one of the bearings had burned out for lack of sufficient lubrication. Now the whole casing, composed of immense and intricate plates, must be taken down, the frozen bearing released and replaced. It was a tremendous job and would take hours.

The simian bodied Saramacca in charge of the pump mumbled and backed away from him as he told him; Von der Klaag knocked him down with a terriffic blow across the face. Then he turned and shouted at the others, commanding them to come and help. The whole operation of the mine was at a standstill until the thing could be fixed.

They labored at that task without stopping and without eating through the late afternoon, the dusk and evening. He led them and forced them, menaced the laggards among them more than once with a wrench or a blow of the carbine butt. It was past midnight and all of them were limp and aching with exhaustion when it was done.

"Go and sleep!" he told them flatly. "I'll be after you at dawn."

They gaped at him, mouths part open, hands lax, as if too weary now fully to understand or react to what he had said. But, one by one, they shambled off toward the bunkhouse while he gathered up the lamps, flashlights and tools they had used during their labor. When he was done, he saw with a certain small degree of grim satisfaction, that the light in the bunkhouse was already out. They had been too spent and cowed even to

bother about eating or arguing after he had dismissed them.

When his cheap American alarm clock jarred beside him and he rose up in his canvas cot to see the silver streamers of the dawn already adrift in the clearing, it took almost all of his own reserve will power to lift himself out and dress. His back, hands and arms were stiff from the labor of the day before. And he had done comparatively little of the work. They, then, were undoubtedly still in a deep, stiff torpor of weariness.

He pounded and yelled for over five minutes at the door of the bunkhouse before any of them heard him. It was another full half hour before they wandered vaguely toward their usual stations and bent cursing over their tools and machines.

A low, thin yet stubborn film of mist lay upon the clearing that day. It seemed to intensify and concentrate the huge force of the sun. Sweat ran from their bodies as if they were fevered. Their mouths were open in the constantly difficult effort of breathing. Even for Von der Klaag, who joined in no effort whatsoever, and was the only one of them to wear any adequate head covering, it was a thing of slow torture to stay upright and in the open.

Before noon the first of them, Rimon, the *libéré*, caved in. He fell moaning and retching on his face, his long handled spade underneath him. Von der Klaag shouted at him, ordering him up. The little man did not rise, or move. The others turned, stopping their work, to watch.

A more than small degree of madness entered Von der Klaag's brain then. In his fevered mental condition, he saw that he was losing his power, his command of himself and these men. He rushed toward Rimon and brutally, unthinkingly, kicked him in the side and back.

It did no good. Rimon only moaned a little louder. Von der Klaag raised his head and stared toward the others through red shot eyes.

"Get to work, you!"

He did not then pause to see if they obeyed him; his major preoccupation now was with the prone man. He slid the Winchester slingstrap over his left shoulder so that the piece swung clear there. Then he stooped down and hefted Rimon's gaunt and light frame upright. But when he took his hands from the man's shoulders, he fell asprawl again. Once more, savage in his rage, Von der Klaag reached down for him.

"Let him be, you Dutch *saligaud!*"

He swerved, hand down for the butt of his revolver. Stregga, his face mottled, dark with rage, stood right behind him. Toward him at once, recognizing what was in the man's eyes, Von der Klaag advanced. Stregga stood crouched and watching him, teeth exposed by his almost blue lips:

"Maybe you're crazy, Dutchman?" He asked it throatily, his eyes on Von der Klaag's narrowed eyes. "That's a man you're kicking and shoving there, not a machine. You got no guts, no compassion or understanding? We know you're tough; we know maybe you got us. But give us a chance. Treat us like men once in awhile. Not like you did the night before last, and last night. Not like you did that poor slob now. Maybe we did slack on the job, and try to jack more gold out of you. But you beat us at that. We're working as hard as we can now. But you can't do that to a white man, not even a *transporté!*"

A guttural and mocking sound came from Von der Klaag. He lifted one hand, his right, and pointed toward Stregga's position:

"Get back and work! *Men!* You pack of *rats!* Go on, or I'll beat you to a raw pulp with my hands!"

"Me?" Stregga laughed, leaped and swiftly struck.

He was no boxer; Von der Klaag was. His long, wild blow passed over the Dutchman's left shoulder and just by his averted face. The Dutchman's left thrust in and caught him full in the face. He staggered, swung with the other hand; hit air. And while he was still off balance

from that blow, Von der Klaag's right crossed in and uppercut him savagely on the jaw.

Stregga screamed like an animal as he fell; as unreasoning as one he rose up and rushed in again. Von der Klaag beat him down, beat him down. Then Stregga did not rise and Von der Klaag laughed.

"More?" he asked in a voice he tried to make calm and mocking. "More?"

Tourdy did not answer him; he rushed him as a bull might rush, head down. From him Von der Klaag sidestepped, and hit at the base of the skull as he passed. But the peasant was a powerful man, and in this moment almost insensible to pain. He swerved, and came back, more slowly and carefully now. Von der Klaag was forced to lead him on, feint with him, all but make mistakes before the other would hit at him and expose himself. But then he too staggered, swung, head rolling and down, bloody mouth agape, and fell, just as Stregga had fallen.

Swiftly, Von der Klaag raised his head, the sharp pain of those last few telling blows running up his arms and to his brain, to brush back the fog of rage there. A warning shout broke from him. He snapped the Webley out, then down fired.

The first slug kicked dirt showering right at the corner of his shack, and within inches of Daubignard. That man whirled and raised his hands as another slug sharded splinters from the shack wall in front of his face.

"Come," called Von der Klaag. He was laughing now. "I would only give you an ugly wound. Anyhow, anything of value in there is locked up, and I have all the keys on my person."

As he spoke he turned to watch the others. Whatever emotions the actions of the three workers had aroused, they were indescernible now. The others stood staring and wide apart, their vague and almost uncaring gazes going from face to face. Laughter rose sharply once more in Von der Klaag's throat; these others were like animals, even more so than the three he had just subdued.

Toward those three he now turned. They were together. Tourdy and Daubignard were helping Stregga, still wobbly and sick, to his feet.

"Listen, you three," he commanded them. "The next time this happens I won't stop as quickly as I did just then. This, now, was just an exhibition. You had an idea you were men. Now you know otherwise. Hell, if any of you had been, you would have left here long ago! But you're not; you're not tough. If you ever get that way, I'll tell you—and then use a gun on you! Meantime, whenever you think about slacking on the job, I'll kick the lousy hides off you. You talk about being men; I'll break your legs and backs giving you practise for the position. Now, get at it!"

He smiled again then, for they were obeying him, going silently and mechanically on with what he had ordered them to do.

THE FIRST of the slides at the end of the gorge wall, where the powerful pipeline stream lashed and ate at the gravel bank, began several days later. Daubignard had spoken of that probability weeks before, when he had begun his abortive mutiny. Now small rushes of gravel slid and crashed fitfully and the three men in direct danger, those handling the pipeline end, asked to be relieved of their jobs and transferred somewhere else. Von der Klaag laughed at them and kept them there.

He did, though, at dusk, after the day's work was done, closely examine the loose, immense bank of gravel. It was going—might go any time. He might stop and have it shored up. It was the last of the pay stuff; when it was done, the mine was done, and all this mad, dragging business would be over. But there would be no great sense in spending several precious days in shoring the thing up with timbers; the pipeline stream would flood them out anyhow. Let the pipeline gang jump and yell when it came; they

were paid for that and would have plenty of warning.

But Daubignard spoke of it haltingly and briefly again the next morning when they turned out for work. Ibrim, the Berber, and the two bushmen who composed the pipeline crew stood nearby, held by two fears. The greater conquered; when the Dutchman lifted the carbine by the barrel and small of the stock and advanced a pace toward Daubignard, they turned and went swiftly toward their position. Von der Klaag grinned and cursed, staring at the haggard, emaciated Frenchman:

"Trying to slack again, hey? Well, your union doesn't stand behind you. Jump to it or I'll flatten you with this!"

Daubignard made no direct answer; he just nodded and slowly backed away.

It came at noon, just as the noon whistle blew. There was no warning, just a crackling, whickering crash, such as a high explosive shell might make upon the moment of impact. The whole top of the bank, of the far gorge wall, gave, fell, in a smoking, grinding, crumbling wave.

Those who stood right below it had no chance at all. They were swept from sight and to death at once. Daubignard and Stregga, working along the sluice boxes, ran and leaped clear just in time. A yard or so behind them, motionless, Von der Klaag stood, his face possessed of the rigidity of a mask, only his eyes alive and moving.

The smoking wave of gravel and loose earth washed waisthigh about him. He dragged himself clear, slowly, first one foot, then the other. From the pumps, the dam and the main sluice box the other men were running, mouths and eyes wide in utter horror.

He found himself then, and spoke with them. He swung the Winchester from his shoulder by its slingstrap and took a shovel also. They dug for hours, frantically. They found Ibrim, the mad Berber, first. He was dead. When they found the other two, the life had already been crushed from them also.

They carried them back and buried them under the wide curve of the cotton tree's branches. He signed to them to go, that it was all, and turned his back to them, went toward his shack, staggering as he walked.

The afternoon hours remained for all of them in that clearing a bright blur of time swiftly passed. Darkness dropped down, an immeasurable curtain. Those who had just buried their mates stood beneath the cotton tree, hands loose by their sides, none of them capable yet of finding words for the confusion of thoughts in their brains.

Inside his shack, Von der Klaag sat with the door shut, the Winchester leaned against the leg of his canvas chair. On the table before him was a crockery bottle holding rum, a glass, and four small, round pellets, his daily ration of quinine tablets, doubled in the last few days.

Mechanically, he took them, washed them down with a fiery noggin of the Demerara rum. It sent flame piercing and stabbing up into his brain. It cleared the fog of confused thoughts there, and brought for a swift, awful moment a clear vision of those three battered bodies.

With his eyes still tightly closed, he reached for and found again the crockery bottle. He drank without using the glass, the cold, slick neck of the thing against his teeth. He shuddered with the shock of the stuff, dropped the bottle clumping to the table. He turned, looking into the room, thinking, almost against his will, of the violin . . .

He started for it, and came back. That vision of the three bodies as they had been just before the soft, loose brown earth had been tossed over them at the roots of the cotton tree would not leave his eyes and brain. He found and strung the violin, talking to himself brokenly, almost incoherently, as he did so.

Outside, where the men hunched beneath the cotton tree, the liquid cascading of the notes came to them. They stared at one another, raising their heads from the contemplation of the graves at

their feet. For a time it caught their brains, held them quiescent and willing to do no more than stand, listening with instinctive eagerness and delight.

Then, with one last fine, true quaver of tones, the instrument was still. That silence released the spell upon them. Daubrignard spoke, like a man emerging from a drug:

"Name of a dirty swine! *Liebestraum*, it was he played, after murdering and burying three men. He is mad, that one. With some, it's the rum, others women. Him—that violin. But he is mad, I tell you."

He stopped shortly. His eyes were certain and small flames in the darkness. His hand reached out and touched upon the shoulders of the men around him, on Tourdy, on Stregga, upon little Rimon, and upon the shoulder of the negro from La Réunion.

"Come," he said. "He told us he'd make men of us, or kill us. He's done that to four now; three, at least. Tomorrow, it might be us, underneath, here. And if not tomorrow, the next day. The jungle is better than this; I see that now, and I see how I can make it better. There—at least—a man may live. Go and get your stuff; we go."

They moved as his voice halted, moved as he had ordered them to, but then turned. The door of the Dutchman's shack had swung creaking back. Von der Klaag stood there. He was bare headed. A folded handkerchief rested on his shoulder. The violin was in one hand, the bow in the other. Head forward, eyes wide and febrile, he stood gazing at them.

"Go on!" repeated Daubignard, wholly sure of himself now. "We will get our pay from this fellow, and much more, later on!"

Von der Klaag made no move to stop them, made no effort to speak. In a silent and dark file, they left the bunkhouse, went across the clearing, and were then gone into the eternal darkness of the jungle. Daubignard went ahead, carrying the machete he and his two companions had brought with them. The others bore what little food they had left to them; that was all.

Daubignard was the only one to stop at the jungle edge. Two of the bushmen had attempted to follow them, go along with them. Those he cursed, threatening them with the machete, sent them shambling back. He did not, he told himself gravely, need men like that. He had enough for his purpose now. The Réunion negro was jungle trained; in that place he could find food and fashion weapons, evil little blowguns and spears, unknown to white men. And through the jungle ran the river, the one avenue to and from the mine. Down that river Von der Klaag must, some day, sooner or later, send his gold and come himself. When he did, there would be payment. Daubignard's veined lids came down part way over his eyes; his fingers smoothed along the wide curve of the machete blade thoughtfully, pleasantly. Then he also stepped into the jungle. For a time Von der Klaag could hear the slow thrash and rustle of the men marching there.

IN THE bunkhouse the kerosene lamp flared yellow. He could see and count the forms of the bushmen there: two men. Two, left to him out of twelve. Two, here with him in the jungle, and those savage, simple, slow witted men who worshipped dark gods, the *Obeah*, and the *Jumbe*.

The screen door of his shack slapped behind him. Bow and violin clattered at his feet. He found his hair, groped down into it. For a time, then, he stared with eyes that did not focus at the slow, blundering swirl of moths and mosquitoes about the smoke patterned globe of the lamp. The aftertaste of the rum and quinine was sour, and bitter in his mouth. Giant hammers seemed to beat in his brain. His head dropped forward on his arms. Tears of fever, of weakness and of rage slid down his unshaven face. Thus he at last fell asleep.

The pad of bare feet at the door awoke

him, sent him starting up beside the smoking pillar of the lamp. Pale carmine light lay upon the clearing outside. It was dawn, past dawn.

"We work, boss? We catchem *oro*, catchem pay?"

"Yes," the word dragged from him, as if with great effort. "You work. I work with you. We catchem gold—*mucho oro*."

In the rhythm and routine of the work that day he again found himself, once more gained back his control and mastery of his nerves. He toiled with the bushmen, he led them, forced them on. He slept deeply that night, exhausted. His attack of fever broke in the morning: he ate heartily and grinned as he and the two blacks toiled at repairing what the slide had done. He had almost forgotten what had happened here, and what Daubignard's words had meant as he had led those four men from the clearing. But he smiled at that as the thought came into his brain. His power and confidence in himself were full and strong. He would still beat the jungle, get his gold.

Weeks rolled, blue skied, dry. High winds, then the *poussière*, the grayish spatter which presaged the heavy rainy season, came. Then it was there, and uncounted, illimitable freshets thundered on the jungle.

He worked through it, drove the bushmen through it, promising them more gold, promising them that in two more months, in two more shipments to the coast, this job would be over, and the mine done. At the height of the rainy season, soaked with moisture, aflame with malaria, Vardon, his French mulatto agent, came in from the coast with his high, brass prowed war canoe and his bonded paddlemen.

He and Vardon got good and drunk that night, to chase away the fever, to forget the rain. But at dawn, cursing this place and his work, the mulatto set off downstream, his rifle across his knees, the gold laid in small, heavy leather sacks beneath the thwarts.

Von der Klaag did not sleep that night. He sat in his shack, before the small warmth and flicker of the lamp, waiting—for quite what he did not know. The gray dawn struck into the clearing. He called the bushmen, made coffee for them all, set to work.

Late in the afternoon he heard the cries from the river. He let go of the pipeline nozzle and went running, his revolver in his hand. A big Dutch negro, one of Varson's paddlemen, was on the bank. A dried froth of blood was on the man's taut, grayish face. From his side the broken end of a blowgun dart thrust up evilly.

In Von der Klaag's shack, rum burning in his throat, the man talked shortly. All the gold was gone; and Vardon was gone, and all the other canoemen. One day's journey down below, they had come across a huge mangrove trunk, felled directly over the stream at a narrow bend. They had stopped, to chop it through, go on.

Then the blowgun hail had come, from both banks. And Herr Vardon had been killed; all the others. The gold? Taken. He himself had fallen into the water from the canoe, slid under the mangrove trunk, with this in his side, so waited there until they, the thieves, had gone in their canoes. The men who had taken it? Not Indians, not bushmen. Whites, some in the soiled canvas of *relégués*, their prison numbers still legible on their shirts. Only one of them had been a black, and he a fierce and wild man, who had laughed and danced as he had fired his blowgun.

Daubignard, Tourdy and Stregga. And the negro from La Réunion. Little Rimon also. Von der Klaag whispered those names. He repeated them a score of times that night, and the next morning, when the big Djoka writhed screaming with the pain of the almost inevitable tetanus, rose half up from the canvas bunk, and fell over, dead.

Von der Klaag did not work that day. Shortly after dawn a canoe from upstream put in against the bank, and a tall, loosely moving and familiar figure

came up toward the group of shacks. Von der Klaag recognized the man at once, and almost ran to meet him. The other was a Jamaica negro, once a Baptist missionary, but for years past one of the most daring and trustworthy mahogany spotters on the Guianan coast. He was now on his regular rainy season trip to the coast. For Von der Klaag, he acted intermittently as postmaster, message bearer and part time agent, for all of which he was well paid.

The two spent the major part of that morning over the rum bottle. When the Jamaican arose to go he was pleasantly drunk and carried, in a small canvas packet sewed to his shirt, a letter to the governor of the colony of French Guiana. Von der Klaag had made his message short and direct.

In it he had told the fate of Vardon, a French citizen, and the fate of his shipment of gold. He reminded the governor that he, Von der Klaag, while not a French citizen, paid not inconsiderable taxes and mining operation permit fees into the colonial treasury annually. He had carefully computed, from an extensive study of the remaining pay gravel in the bank, the days he would be forced to remain here. At the end of that time, he demanded that a sufficient military guard be furnished by the governor, and meet him here, to convoy him and his final gold shipment out to the coast. He also, as closely as he could, indicated the position of the convict marauder gang in the jungle, so that the governor, if he saw fit, might take punitive measures against Daubignard and his companions in the meanwhile.

Smiling, as his canoe heeled free from the bank, the lank Jamaican lifted a hand from his paddle and waved to him. Smiling, once more completely sure of himself, Von der Klaag waved back and turned toward the mine and his gold.

Von der Klaag and the pair of bushmen worked for three weeks more. Then, just as he had anticipated and calculated, the gold gave out. The mine was done. But, piled there in his shack, where he had brought it, weighed and sacked it at the end of each day's work, was his final fortune, his last payment for these awful years in the jungle. It was enough, and more than enough. With what was here, added to what he had already sent out to Holland during the first years of his stay, he would have enough to go on as he had before; would have enough to return to the gray, lovely, narrow house in the Hague which had been his father's, and would be his, and his bride's.

One thing alone bothered him now. According to his schedule, as put forth in his letter to the governor at Cayenne, the troop guard should have been here the day before. That they would be late he doubted, and that they would not come at all he was now almost certain. For during these last three weeks of fierce labor while he had driven himself and the two bushmen, he had come to the conclusion that very probably his Jamaican negro courier had been apprehended on the river by Daubignard and his men, the letter to the governor found and the Jamaican and the message destroyed.

But he smiled, even as he thought of that, still strong in his confidence, and called the two bushmen to him. To each man, separately, he gave his promised portion of the gold. He talked to them, his hands moving restlessly along the barrel and stock of the Winchester as he did so. Their situation, he told them, was the same as his. In no way was it different. They must all get out to the coast with their gold. They must go down the river. There was no other way. Now, at the height of the rainy season, no man could go through the bush.

One of the bushmen answered him, in the strange jargon of the *talki-talki*. It was not necessary, the man muttered, for them to attempt to go straight down the river to the coast. No. He knew this country. All his life he had lived in it, fishing, rubber hunting, floating occasional rafts of logs down to St. Laurent.

There was only one high spot of land,

during the rainy season, where men could possibly live along the river between here and the coast. The men who had robbed Vardon must be there now, if they were anywhere in the jungle. And, half a day's canoe journey above that lone knoll of land, there was, due to the rainy season, a small stream which was navigable by canoes. That stream led off, into Dutch Guiana, and west, so through a network of other small streams, and right into well settled country. Everything would be good there. And then would Von der Klaag give them each an additional bag of gold, for telling him this?

He smiled and laughed, surprising them, who had felt his rage so many times in the last month. Yes, they would have two additional bags of gold apiece. And now, they were to go.

He left the violin, his clothes, the machines and the mine just as they were. His store of food in the canteen was nearly exhausted. The last of it he stowed into the one big dugout canoe they were to use. At his orders, the bushmen loaded in the gold, sack by sack, while he stood above them on the bank, water sluicing in little cascades from his stiff, yellow oilskinned suit. There was nothing—nothing to keep him now.

"Good," he said hoarsely when it was done. "We go."

The bushmen did not look back at the mine; he did not. As the canoe swung out from the bank and the negroes' pointed paddles caught deep, he was whispering his fiancée's name.

A fog which was a deep blue wall of danger rested on the river. Through it, they paddled swiftly all that day. At night they did not stop. He gave the bushman in the bow the big flashlight he had brought with him, ordered the man to flick it on, lash it there with green withes. So, the negroes nodding at the paddles, he sitting strong, calm and grinning at the steering sweep, they went on, in the full, dark sweep of the current.

Dawn flowered there, bringing a pallor to the mists and river. The negroes nodded and shook their carefully combed heads. The man in the bow raised his paddle and pointed at the stark gnarl of a dead mangrove tree on the west bank. Beyond that, he mumbled back, was the stream they would take. Now, he and the other were hungry; would like food.

Von der Klaag nodded sleepily and brought the steering sweep inboard. The Winchester, its breech covered with a strip of canvas, was across his knees. He reached over it, to get at the piles of food tins stored forward of him.

Suddenly and deeply the canoe lurched. He all but lost his balance, all but fell overboard. Dimly and brokenly, he saw the bright arc of the descending paddle. The blow hit him on the throat and shoulder, momentarily paralyzing that side. Through the swift paralysis of the pain coming upon him, he reached for the Winchester, fired up, right at a black, tensed stomach. Then the second man was at him, battering with a paddle, biting at his shoulder and face, kneeing him in the groin.

Darkness was toppling upon him in a great, roaring wave. His right hand strained loose, found the revolver at his hip. A black knee butted at his face, cracking the bones of his nose, jerking back his head. But the gun was in his hand, jumping again and again with the recoil of the shots.

From his relaxing hand the revolver dropped to the rain washed bottom of the canoe. Steam from the hot barrel of the gun started up, a brief and warm cloud about his face. He made one last violent and conscious gesture, thrust out his booted foot. The quivering black body of the man he had just shot rolled and tettered on the gold sacks from that impact. It swerved against that of the other bushman, hunched and horrible midships. For just a moment they hesitated there, to slide abruptly overside with a flat splashing sound that echoed, deepened and then fully possessed his brain . . .

RAIN drops were cool and sweet in his open mouth when that sound ebbed from his brain and consciousness came back. For a long time his bruised eyes did not focus. Then he saw vaguely that the canoe was against the bank, rammed in upon overhanging mangrove branches by the pull of the current.

He tried to sit up; found that he could not, groaned, cursing, and lay back. The dim blue circle of his luminous watch dial told him that hours had passed since he had lost consciousness. Night was coming again upon the river and the jungle. There was the rain blurred sound of the merged chorus of the night doves, gold birds and small monkeys, given throbbing bass accompaniment by the deep, booming cough of the frogs.

It was that sound which kept him from hearing the scrape and thud of paddles along gunwale bars, the sharp breathing of the crouched men in the dugout that swung upstream. In a copper green arc that cut like a dull sword, the calcium fed bow light of the canoe swung through the ragged beauty of the mists. The canoe stayed in the center of the stream, propelled at a steady pace by its four paddlers. From him, the exact outlines of the paddlers were held by the mists. But the peculiar glare of that searchlight he recognized. It had been Vardon's. Then these men . . .

His bruised and pain clumsy hand groped along the gold sack, found the moisture-slick coolness of the Winchester stock and barrel. He drew the gun to him, pushing the cocking lever forward, and back. He raised the muzzle, turning his right shoulder so that he might shoot. But then his index finger slid downward from the trigger.

That canoe in which sat Daubignard, Stregga and the others was going on, past. They had not seen him, although they sought him, his canoe and his gold. It was obvious now to him that they had been aware, within a few hours or so, of his actions and departure from the mine, that they had apprehended his letter, known he would come on time. They had waited by their knoll of high ground. He had not come, although it was his arrogant and unchangeable nature always to move by schedule. Now they had remembered the little stream upriver, and come up, confident that they, strong paddlers, would overtake him and his two surly bushmen . . .

Already the green bar of light which marked that canoe was up the river from him, swerving on a slow tangent as its crew sought the brush covered mouth of the smaller stream. He tried to smile with his torn lips. It would not come; a slow, cold and vague fear rose up in his brain. They were leaving him here, alone in the jungle.

Branches quivered rustling beside him on the bank. Moisture from the thick mat of leaves pattered down. He did not see the great snake that slid from the branch of the mangrove, dropped down and across his canoe and so into the water. He sensed it, heard it, felt its momentary and almost fluid weight across his sprawled legs and ankles. That was too much for him. It was then that the last, fine, thin edge of his courage broke, and he screamed, firing the rifle at the jungle roof.

When they turned and came back, the words he tried to articulate were gibbered, animal sounds. But they did not have to understand what he had tried to say. It was all there—the cracked paddle, the dark pattern of blood stains on the leather of the gold sacks, the Winchester and revolver empties on the canoe bottom, his own face, body and condition.

His attempts at speech stopped. He tried to look at them, peering through the radiance of the searchlight they had swung on his face. Stregga and Tourdy held their canoe in alongside. It was they who did the talking. He listened to them, hearing all they said, but not understanding, or caring. All emotion had left him. With that one scream and the pressure of the trigger, his volition and personal power had gone from him. He

heard and saw little more. Stregga spoke.

"Easier than we thought; quicker than we thought. And look at him—the slave driver. Those two blacks did that. Good job. But they didn't finish it. Seems he was still too tough for them. But—"

"None of that." Tourdy's voice had a hoarse note. "Not for me."

Stregga cursed him, with the vile strength of expression of the prisoner.

"You think I want that, you swab? You think—why, none of us—"

The harsh staccato of his voice halted abruptly, expression for his swift surge of thoughts beyond him. From behind him Daubignard spoke rapidly.

"What are you two mugs after? What's holding you? I thought you wanted this guy, wanted to kick hell out of him, pay him as he paid us. I thought that was what you waited here for, in this damn fever hole, and not what gold he had."

Stregga cursed him then, turning so that he might gaze at him over the craned heads of little, mute Rimon and the gaping Réunion negro.

"You're too smart, mug! Your brains get in your own way. Tourdy and me did want to take it out of this guy's hide. So did you—all of us. But who in the name of a name can do anything to a guy like that? Who can—go on! You say it; you're the guy with the fancy words!"

They swung on Daubignard. In this moment the intensity of their emotions and thoughts concentrated on him, not on the bloody, gasping man in the other canoe. But only haltingly, and after a time of silence, did Daubignard speak.

"Yes." He nearly whispered it. "You caught it right, Stregga. You felt it before I thought it. Civilization, the whole works—the prisons, the jungle, the Dutchman, here, were too tough for us. He did what he threatened to do—made men out of us; forced us to it. And now we're stronger than him, and he's come to us for help. Funny; but true. That's why you couldn't kill him now. That's why we're going to take him out within a day of the coast. We owe him a couple of debts, and we pay them all that way. And when we do that, this new strength, this power we got, will be ours for good. And nobody will be able to take it from us—not now."

Surely and unhurriedly, they moved then. After a time there were no sounds there except those of the jungle and the dark, rushing river.

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

ON THE occasion of his first appearance in our pages, Gordon Carroll, author of "The Uhlan" in this issue, rises to introduce himself to the Camp-fire.

Easton, Maryland

If a bit of the sea, a bit of soldiering and a slice of newspaper work qualify one for a place by the Camp-fire, I humbly edge my way forward into its gleam.

Several years ago, during one of the post-Revolution upheavals in Berlin, I was seated in a surburban café, the table before me trembling to the rumble of tanks and artillery on the asphalt outside, rolling down to Unter den Linden where the malcontents were rioting. My waiter, a war cripple, gestured to the passing military display. The gleam in his eye belied his shattered leg, his gray hair, and I felt that here was one former soldier who had lost only his body—not his spirit—in the war. From him I gleaned a halting story of his Uhlan days, a story typical of many. Next morning, when I returned to the café, I learned the waiter had fallen the night before when Reich troops fired on the rioters. How he came to the fatal spot, I don't know; perhaps he followed the tanks. Anyhow, Captain Stefan Mueller was born of this incident—a soldier bound to tradition, even in death.

The Canadian Army took me to the war—and brought me back, whole. Since then, I have shipped on many a freighter, hammered many a newspaper typewriter. Last year, I retreated from Park Row to a self-made G. H. Q. on the Eastern Shore, where the countryside is peaceful, rivers and fields abound and traffic is limited to one Ford each day—the mailman's. With the abiding confidence of all writers, I expect to remain here—until one of those strange but familiar urges routs me out, points me for some distant spot again. —GORDON CARROLL

A LETTER from Comrade Frank G. Babylon. His enclosed notes from a Legionnaire's diary are something in the way of a scoop, to use a newspaper expres-

sion, for our Fire, for I'm sure you will all find them as graphic a record of a man's adventure's as you've read in many a day. They are set down here verbatim and unedited, for reasons that are obvious. First Mr. Babylon's letter:

Adventure Pen Club,
860 N. Canal St., Pittsburgh, Pa.

The enclosed notes I have copied from the memos sent me by one of our members, a soldier of the French Foreign Legion. He was first made acquainted with me through Georges Surdez, of *Adventure's* writers' brigade. Since then we have become fast friends and he is one of the finest members of our club, named after the magazine. I will vouch for every word in this story, and I'm sure Georges will too.

Our members now number over a hundred *Adventure* readers, all intensely interested in Camp-fire, and I'm sure everybody would enjoy reading this diary by one of our members. The writer has asked me not to publish his name because of the consequences that may arise from making this information public. He is a young man nineteen years old and of Polish descent, who ran away from home at fifteen and joined the Legion. He has won the Colonial Medal, with palms; also the Croix de Guerre for bravery under fire; and the following notes will give you an idea of the sort of life they really lead.

—FRANK G. BABYLON, Secretary.

The notes:

Wednesday

OUR platoon having passed inspection by the captain, and having made a few more minor preparations, marched off to Meridja. What a march that was, due to the very little rain we get here, and the day was very hot and the dust was terrible. Our rest period did not amount to much due to the large amount of dust, and we sure have it here in the region of the Sahara. On top of that we had trouble with the mules who after going so far refused to go any further. But we use mules in preference to horses because of their sure footing in the mountains. I was a most unlucky fellow having two mules to take care of, one with a saddle for me to ride and the other with a special saddle to carry munitions and supplies.

After six weary hours we came to the River Djof-Torba, which in the dry season is just a puddle and in the wet season a raging torrent. From the river to our destination was only three hours, but due to the high river we camped for the night in hopes that the water would recede overnight. The captain picked a spot on a hill about forty yards back from the river. After having pulled the saddles and watered the mules and done a few more chores, we gave a few thoughts to ourselves for the night's rest. The days here are very hot and the nights very cool. I threw a saddle blanket on the ground and lay down and threw another blanket and coat over me and slept till my comrade called me for soup, but I was so darned tired that I was not hungry and he ate my rations. At eleven o'clock I was awakened to do sentinel duty.

Thursday

IN THE early morning our lieutenant, an Italian, went down and looked at the river to see if it was possible to cross. The water had gone down a little. We were ordered to prepare the mules and an hour later started for the water. I took off my shoes and entered the water with the two mules. The water was about three and a half feet deep and was up to my elbows. The current was so strong that I had to go very slowly and carefully forwards. This was one of my unlucky days, as one of the mules fell down as we hit the middle. He disappeared and came in sight a ways down stream and I swam and tried to help him keep up but it was impossible. Another comrade came to my aid and I told him to hold the mule's head up to keep him from drowning. I pulled off the saddle and the cover was washed away before I could get it. With the help of another man we managed to get the mule ashore.

After going on for two more miles was again stopped to have mess and make a few more repairs. I took advantage of the stop and changed my clothes. We were nearing Meridja and the country around is very wild, full of mountains and sand and a few rare palms. At last we arrived at the post. The post is built of sun dried bricks, and is shaped in triangle form. After finding our quarters, which composed many little rooms, we went to the supply depot to get our beds, which compose of a long bag which we fill with straw and another empty bag used as a cover.

Saturday

FROM one to three in the morning I was watching the mules. One of the chains broke and the mules scattered all over the yard and after very hard work I managed to get them all together again before the officer came around or I would have caught it. We were up again at six o'clock and the corporal told me to clean the saddles and rifles. After dinner we were ordered to get ready to go out again but while waiting we played cards and I won 600 cigarettes and then we were ordered to go back to bed again and I was happy because I had a few smokes for awhile.

Sunday

ANOTHER false alarm during the night and we were ordered to be ready again and when daylight came we were still waiting and started to play cards on a little wooden box that was in the room and in two hours I lost the cigarettes I won besides my own. It was another unlucky day for me.

Monday

AT 4:30 A.M. we were ordered out to build a road. After going five miles from the post we tied our mules in a circle and left a man to watch. Some of us dug up the stones and others carried them to

the road and we worked till ten o'clock and rested till one and then quit at four and returned to the post. During our absence the 4th section had gone to Djaf-Torba and did not get back till midnight.

Tuesday

AT 3:30 in the morning we were ordered out and went to the desert of Getit-Hammada (a stony place). There is very little water in this place. After 15 miles we came to a group of palms and stopped there. We were ordered to cut down some trees and I crawled in the bush and slept till the others were ready. I am not a lazy cuss, but like all the others don't want to work when I don't have to and for such a small salary. We loaded four Arab wagons with wood and started back to the post. There I received a letter from home which I enjoyed very much because it has been a long time since I heard from my people.

Thursday

WE WORKED until mess time. An aeroplane brought a message stating the Shleu (Arab bandits) were sighted not far from Meridja, and we were ordered back and the night passed quietly.

Friday

WE WERE very busy today breaking stones and building walls all day, and in the evening I was detailed for sentinel duty from 8 till 10. After being replaced I returned to my quarters and then was ordered to clean up the saddles, and when the time came to turn in we were very tired.

Saturday

AT 4 A.M. we were ordered out on the road again starting in the direction of Tafilalet. In this section the Arabs are always preparing ambushes and always evading a major battle because of their few numbers. After every ambush the Shleu capture a few Legionnaires and torture them and it is sometimes terrible to see the bodies afterwards.

The road from Meridja to Tafilalet was very bad, the mountains descending in huge steps some twenty inches high. After four hours of gruelling march an aeroplane dropped another message and after the lieutenant read it over we continued on to Berbatine. Here there are three wells and good water and a few palms. After a two hour rest we started again towards the Grand Hammada. On the road there we came across an aeroplane that had crashed but we could not stop.

We started up the mountains again and the road was very narrow and one misstep meant the death of mule and rider. It was very difficult for me as I had two mules to care for, but we finally reached the top without accident. Before us was the grand plateau de Hammada, sixty miles wide and eighty miles long, and no water in the whole desert. We continued on and sometimes found the wild gumtree which is very rare. In the distance we could see a few wild goats (gazelle). Also many jackals that cried through the nights and make the shivers run through you. As we came to the edge of the desert we saw many large birds, some a foot high with a wing spread of five to six feet. The place was full of reptiles and tarantulas. The most dangerous of these being the viper. At last we stopped at a water hole known as Zguilma. We could not stay here long because it was in a valley and a good spot for an ambush. We moved on a little further and camped for the night.

Sunday

SUNDAY, a day of rest for some but just another day for us, and we were up early cleaning up a big space so a plane could land. At mess we were each given three cups of flour to make bread. A comrade and I made ours together. He prepared the bread while I built the fire. I dug a hole in the ground the shape of the bread and placed stones at the bottom and made a fire on these of dry grass and little bushes. When the stones were hot I placed the bread on them and covered with ashes and ground so the heat would hold and then built a fire on top of it. A little later the officer came for bread inspection and ours was still in the fire but another Legionnaire had eaten his and was promised a severe penalty when we returned.

Afternoon the plane landed and brought news, but they were kept secret. Two sections were detailed back to Zguilma to get water and I was among them. We took along a little keg to fill. We had to dip it out with a cup as there was just a hole there. The water was very bad, smelly and dark brown in color, but it was the only water we had so we drank it. It took us about two hours to fill the keg. When we returned I was ordered to do sentinel duty for an hour. The night passed without any disturbance.

Monday

THIS was to turn out to be the most unhappy day of my life and I will never forget till I die. Around nine o'clock another company of Legionnaires arrived from Morocco. Later our platoon started towards Dzhani and the company from Morocco started back to Berbatine. After two hours of marching in the hot sun, I heard bullets whistling over our heads and at first thought that some of our men were shooting gazelles. I ran to a hill and on the other side saw section 4 scattered between the rocks and I realized they were being attacked. I ran back to the mule and cut the ropes with a bayonet and put the ammunition on the ground. Our lieutenant came running back and ordered me to take the ammunition back 100 yards to another hill and I had to lead them on again and beat it back and believe me it was a tough job to get that mule started back, but we got there and unloaded and another man came and took away the mule.

I then distributed the boxes around to the men and each man got a box, leaving me four. We re-

treated to another hill a little ways back and the air was filled with lead. The man who was in front of me was carrying the machine gun and stopped. I asked him what was the matter and he said he could go no further, so I got the gun and went on. It weighed 48 pounds. A Première (First Class in the French Army) came up and took the gun and we ran together to the hill. Five yards in back of us was a natural trench so we moved there and set the gun up and started to fire. The gun jammed, just our luck, and we cleaned it and then it refused to work and we were in a real jam. Our sergeant saw us trying to fix the gun and raised hell, he kicked it away from us and told us to use the rifles.

I started to fire kneeling with the sergeant kneeling right behind me. His rifle was only fifteen inches from my face and the fire from it was scorching my skin but the lead was flying so thick I didn't mind. We could see the Arabs on the plateau on the front and right closing in and they wanted to surround us. We ran towards a hill a few yards away but it became so hot we had to return minus a few men. I picked up a belt of ammunition and saw that a bullet had cut it in two. The sergeant and I splitted the works.

MY GUN was so hot I could hardly hold it. The trench we were in was so full and I was on the end and it became too hot there for me so I ran to a rock and was there only a minute when a bullet ricochetted off the rock and I got a splinter in my arm. I dug it out with my knife and nearly fainted but after I bandaged it it felt better.

A few yards from me one fellow was hit and laid over on his back and shaded his eyes with his hand till he died. His comrade was wrapping up a hole in the side of his leg with a piece of shirt. The Arabs made a rush and I jumped up and was hit in the thigh and dropped down again, and God how that did hurt. Thoughts of home and my mother came to me and I got mad. I managed to crawl to another rock. Here I bandaged up my leg and started to fire again. I was a good piece away from the company and did not notice them descending into the valley.

I then noticed the Shleu were only thirty yards in front of me and the platoon about 200 yards in back on the other side of the valley. I was told later that it was me who made it possible for the company to get a better position. I started to run towards my comrades and saw the Arabs pointing their guns towards me and then I forgot all about my wounds and ran like hell. How I made it no one can explain, but I did with the help of a few bushes and rocks.

AMONG the trees I found the mules and after finding a gerba (leather bag containing water) I punched a hole in it and maybe that dirty, brackish water did not taste good. I started back to the valley and the lead was coming so fast I was obliged to drop in back of a rock that was just big enough to protect me and the chips of rock were flying in all directions. The lieutenant and a couple of my comrades were a few yards from me. The sun was getting low and no help coming and I was beginning to give up. Just then a plane swooped over our heads and very low flew around to give us encouragement. What a sight that was, the most welcome in my life because my leg and arm were hurting me terrible.

In a hour the Shleu stopped firing and I wondered what happened and I sure was about to give up again. About fifteen minutes later I saw two Arabs coming towards us from the hill and drew down on them but recognized them as two of the members from the company that started for Morocco. With the rifle used as a crutch and my good foot I made it back to the mules and got some water and brought it to the lieutenant and comrades. The other company chased the Arabs but they had a good start and got away. I had a few dates in my pocket and ate them and they tasted like honey. The wounded men were reassembled and the plane came back dropped a box of bandages and the men were fixed up. My leg was red clean down to my toes with blood and the bullet was still in my thigh. My arm had started to bleed again and was hurting to beat hell. They laid me down and covered me with a horse-blanket and I fell into a sleep.

Tuesday

THIS morning they gathered up all our dead comrades and buried them in two graves. The captain now ordered the company to the graves and they were given a Legionnaires farewell. The wounded beside me were crying and cursing and I was too sick to even do that. After dinner we started towards Berbatine. They placed me on a mule and I suffered the tortures of hell on our way back and was clear out of my head nearly all the ways back, but we finally arrived. I got off the mule and crawled towards the water wells and drank and drank until they pulled me away. Another plane came and dropped more bandages and some food, but we were so sick we could not eat. They placed us in the middle of the camp that evening and I could not sleep all night with pain and it seemed like ten years.

Wednesday

THEY put me on a mule again and we started towards Meridja, and I became out of my mind again. At last came the auto-ambulance and they took us to Meridja in about an hour. The 9th company presented arms as we came up. They put me in a clean room that was hurriedly prepared for us. While the doctor was washing out my wounds and asked me if it hurt because I was laughing. I told him it was because I could not cry. They put me back to bed and a sergeant came with tea and biscuits and I ate a little. We were put in a plane and taken to the hospital at Colomb-Bechar. When we arrived many of the military men and civilians were there to greet us. One woman whom I will always remember looked at me and said "Poor boy." They put us to bed and I went to sleep at once.

Ask Adventure

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Yacht

SECOND HAND sailing boats can be picked up cheaply, especially this year.

Request:—"Would be greatly interested to know what a fair average price for an eighteen to twenty-two foot 'centerboard' boat would be.

I believe this type is also called a 'mainsail-jib' boat.

Would prefer a used boat about five years old if it were in fair condition, but would also like to know what a new one would cost."

—PAUL B. MOSHER, New York City

Reply, by Mr. A. R. Knauer:—Boats of this general size can be purchased from $450.00 to $700.00 new. The Cape Cod Boat Building Corporation build a boat of this type. You might communicate with them and see what they have.

Used boats can be purchased at almost any price and occasionally you can find a real bargain. However, a boat five years old that has not been taken care of would be worth very little. I know of one recently sold for $175.00, which was three years old, in pretty fair condition.

Unless it is necessary that you use a centerboard boat, I would suggest very strongly that you purchase a Star Class, as this class is the most popular in the world, having fleets spread all over the globe, and are probably the snappiest small sailing boats afloat. These boats, I believe, can be purchased for from $700.00 to $1100.00 new, and second-hand boats at almost every price.

There are a great many of these in your vicinity and you could probably pick one up at almost any price you care to spend.

Yucatan

MERIDA, the capital, seems an ideal place in which to open a good American restaurant.

Request:—"Would you please advise me concerning conditions in Yucatan and the country thereabouts—particularly as regards opportunities for one wishing to open an American restaurant. My cooking experience runs over a long period, both in America in logging camps, pipe line camps, hospitals as well as cooking for Foreign Legion regiments in Africa and French Colonies around China."

—JOHN SCHMIDT, Houston, Texas

Reply, by Mr. W. Russell Sheets:—I recently received information from Merida, the capital of Yucatan, from which I read that business is not booming there but that does not mean it is not good. The Yucatecans are very wealthy and used to having the best of things.

To Merida you should go. It is a beautiful city of 100,000 population. There are probably twenty to thirty Americans established there in business. All of the wealthy Yucatecan families have been edu-

cated abroad and would relish an American restaurant if it were a high class establishment. There are transient Americans on every boat that comes who would patronize an American restaurant 100%, I believe. If you got it to going good, and could set up a clean place, I think you would do very well.

State Police

PENNSYLVANIA is a very particular State in the matter of selecting troopers.

Request:—"Please give me some information concerning the Pennsylvania State Police qualifications.

I am now in the United States Army, and at the end of my enlistment. I would like to get a job on the State Police force, if possible. My home is in Pittsburg."

—JOHN P. COUGHENOUR, Oahu, Hawaii

Reply, by Mr. Francis H. Bent, Jr.:—Applicant for Pennsylvania State Police must be citizen of U. S.; of good moral character; present at least three letters of character reference from home town; be able to ride a horse; be at least 5′ 6½″ tall, without shoes; between 20 and 40 years old; and preferably single. Men with military or naval training are given preference.

Both physical and mental examinations are given. Physical examination is very rigid. Mental examination is of a general nature and intended to show the applicant's general education. These examinations are competitive.

Write to the Superintendent of State Police, Harrisburg, Pa., for application blanks. These are to be carefully filled out and returned. If they are acceptable you will be notified when and where to report for examinations. If you pass these exams, you will be sent to the training troop at Hershey. There you will receive intensive training in cavalry drill, first aid, self-defense, fire control, actions to the public, etc., etc., in fact everything that will benefit you as a trooper. After the training period is over you will be given a final examination and if you pass this, you will be assigned to a troop for active duty.

Radio

MAKING a New York-Africa contact with a portable short wave set.

Request:—"Would it be possible to buy or construct a short wave radio transmitting and receiving set for communication between the middle of Africa and New York City without needing so much equipment as to prevent the set's being carried about by porters?

If so, what would you suggest in the way of equipment?

Could power be supplied by a gasoline engine small enough and light enough to be carried by two men if slung on a pole? Would some sort of manual operated dynamo be practical?

I am planning a trip to about the central portion of Africa with an explorer. We expect to be out about six months. I would like to be able to radio a daily story direct to New York if possible.

Any information as to what requirements, examinations, or other government restrictions I would encounter in Africa would be appreciated."

—R. D. LINTON, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Reply, by Mr. Donald McNicol:—You should have no trouble procuring a satisfactory sending and receiving radio telegraph—short wave—outfit for your trip to Africa. You could buy one for less than it would cost you to make one up. My suggestion would be to get in touch with one of the smaller manufacturers who are making such outfits. Write to Mr. S. Egert, 179 Greenwich St., New York, asking him for price on a small gasoline driven motor-generator transmitter and short wave receiver.

One of the oil companies has a small outfit in Liberia with which by short wave signaling they maintain continuous communication with New York. There are various other such contacts.

Depends on what part of Africa you intend to visit what you would require in the way of a permit, but usually this is easily arranged upon proper identification abroad.

Practise up on your code by "sending" mentally while you are reading a newspaper. Good idea to hook up a cell of dry battery, a sending key and a common 10-cent buzzer for practise. You are improving your "reception" all the time you are practising sending.

Sumatra

A WHITE man can't expect to perform manual labor in the tropics. And in the Dutch East Indies one has to speak Dutch to get on. It's a bad place in which to go broke.

Request:—"Reading your reply to Mr. John Wilkinson's inquiries about Sumatra prompts me to ask you a few other questions regarding the same territory.

I am twenty-five years old, single, white and well educated. Also, I am extremely tired of city life and city work and would really like to try something entirely different.

Now as to the questions:

What class of work is the main feature in a country such as Sumatra?

What is the average wage scale for a white man in these particular classes of work?

What necessary education must one have to hold such positions?

How long term a contract is customary?"

—K. M. LUCAS, Chicago, Illinois

Reply, by Capt. R. W. van Raven de Sturler:—While I can understand the desire of a man of your

age to step out and spend a few years in some beautiful isle of the tropics, allow me to advise you to give such a step the most thorough consideration, to decide if you possess any special ability or training that may be of advantage and, in any case, to make up your mind that you will have to face and overcome considerable hardships before possibly winning out in the end.

My letter to Wilkinson to which you refer stands in a class by itself and can not serve as "general" advice because his was an exceptional case from which all hazard was eliminated by reason of the permanent employment he was fortunate to have found—he was going under a three year contract and at a very fair salary. In other words, all he had to do was perform his duties satisfactorily and collect his emoluments *each month without fail*, a state of affairs which, to say the least, is a rare one for Americans in the Dutch East Indies.

An American or other foreigner in Sumatra or any other part of the Dutch East Indies is generally handicapped by his inability to speak and write the official language, Dutch, and either Malayan or Javanese; he therefore can not expect remuneration such as his American ideas seem to justify until he has mastered at least Dutch and one or the other native languages sufficiently.

If he is a *good* engineer, *good* auto mechanic, *good* dentist or dental mechanic, or excels in some other profession, his chances to succeed quickly are, of course, many times more favorable, but even such a one will have to be prepared to search for many months for employment which will pay him a living wage during which time he will have to support himself as a *white* man, necessitating a minimum expenditure of about $25 to $30 a week.

You might inquire at the office of some of the big oil and tobacco firms operating in the Orient who may be able to make an opening for you or advise you in the matter.

I do not specifically answer any of your questions simply because in the Orient the white man can not actually perform manual labor himself—because an average wage scale does not exist—because an American without thorough experience can not get a contract from any white firm in the Orient, except, if sent out by an American firm that has trained him for his work at their own headquarters, and because to succeed the broadest possible education is always the most in demand.

I honestly regret not to be able to encourage you in your desire. However, it is better to live modestly in the States than go broke in the Orient.

Gun

DIRECTIONS and formula for blueing the barrel.

Request:—"I would greatly appreciate directions and formula for blueing rifle or gun barrels."

—CHAS. R. BUCK, M. D., Youngstown, Ohio

Reply, by Mr. Donegan Wiggins:—Today few men, if any, outside the gunsmithing trade, make up their own blueing solution.

The one appearing in the Ask Adventure columns some time since was from Sawyer's book, "Our Rifles", and was designed for the muzzle loading rifles with salt iron barrels of the past century. I doubt its working at all on the modern steel barrel. It is as follows:

1½ oz. alcohol, same of tincture of iron, corrosive sublimate, sweet spirits of niter; 1 oz. blue vitriol, ¾ oz. nitric acid, mixed in 1 quart pure water. This solution was mixed, and after the barrel was polished well, and cleaned with lye to remove all grease marks, wooden plugs were driven in breech and muzzle, both as handles and to keep the solution from entering the bore.

Then the solution was daubed on copiously, and allowed to form rust; this was removed with a fine wire scratchbrush, and the process repeated until the desired shade was obtained. Several coats were necessary.

Most men today, when refinishing barrels or parts, send to the makers of some good solution, and follow the directions accompanying the bottle closely. Our local gunsmith uses the solution put out in pint bottles by the following man, with very fine results:

Mr. Phil Holmes, Alisky Bldg., Portland, Oregon.

Another fine one is sold by the following firm:

Hoffman Arms Co., Ardmore, Oklahoma.

Muskrat

A GOOD fence is important on the fur farm. The 'rats thrive in well managed captivity, but they have a natural longing for freedom. If they can't burrow under the fence they try to go over the top.

Request:—"1. Does one pair of muskrats stay paired for long and how many young ones will they raise per year?

2. What do you feed them?

3. Could you describe for me just the kind of plant that would be necessary on an acre—fences, buildings, etc.?" —C. A. STOVALL, Ironton, Ohio

Reply, by Fred L. Bowden:—1. Muskrats do not pair, that is, the same as foxes or wolves, for instance; the muskrat is polygamous, and in placing your stock allow about one male to five or six females. This is enough males. If you have more than this the males will fight during the mating season, and this is bad for pelts and breeding. Under ideal conditions the 'rats will usually breed twice during a season, and sometimes three times if they happen to breed the first time early in the spring. From five to nine to a litter is about the average, depending on the vigor of the parents, age, etc. Young 'rats born in April will sometimes breed the following September, but it is not wise to allow this, as you will be likely to get small weak offspring from this sort of mating.

2. Carrots, green corn, lettuce, celery, clover; if no bushes growing on your marsh, be sure and provide them with branches of willow, poplar, or alder; this is important, because the 'rats must have something to gnaw to prevent excess growth of the upper teeth, which otherwise grow down over the lower ones until the animal starves to death, because of inability to open its mouth. I suggest here that you go to your library and get books on the subject of muskrat raising, or you can find books on this subject advertised in any of the better outdoor hunting and fishing magazines.

3. Fencing: Cyclone fencing is good; any of the better grades advertised for this purpose in the magazines. The fence should be set under the ground for 24 inches to discourage digging, and set your fence as much as possible on dry ground, as the muskrats do not like to dig in dry ground. Use old gas or water pipe for posts, if possible; this can be usually secured cheaply at a junk yard. You must put an apron on the top, or a plate of sheet iron on the bottom, 18 inches high; otherwise your muskrats "will go over the top" as fast as you can place them in your tract. The most important thing about a muskrat farm to my mind is the fencing, and also this is the heaviest cost, but it will pay mighty good dividends. Don't skimp on your fencing; if you place choice stock into your farm and lose it, there is no percentage in that. The only building necessary is the building where you would keep your supplies, tools, etc. If you are located so that you can raise vegetables for your 'rats it will help a lot, especially with pelt prices where they are now.

Tropical Forestry

TEAK, rubber and mahogany concessions, despite their farflung acres, employ few foresters.

Request:—"I am very much interested in tropical forestry and would like to take up this work. No doubt you can tell me where I can get schooling along this line.

I would like to get sufficient knowledge to qualify for a job with Firestone, Goodyear, the U. S. Rubber Co., or perhaps a teak or mahogany concession. Any schools you can refer me to, or general information you can give me, will be appreciated."

—ROBERT ASTON, Detroit, Michigan

Reply, by Mr. Wm. R. Barbour:—Tropical forestry is of course a special phase of forestry. One must take forestry and gradually specialize on the tropical end of it. There are only two forest schools in the U. S. which are equipped to teach the tropical end. They are the Yale School of Forestry, New Haven, Conn., and the School of Forestry of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mich. The former is entirely post-graduate, the latter both undergraduate and post-graduate.

Teak concessions employ only British foresters. Rubber companies sometimes employ foresters, but so far as I know are not employing any at this time. Mahogany companies have not so far gone in for forestry.

Tropical forestry is probably about the smallest profession there is. So far as tropical America is concerned, there are less than ten men in all who have specialized in that field. Jobs are about as few as men to fill them, but I believe sooner or later the republics of Latin America will start forest services and thus open up new fields for trained tropical men.

The only technically trained foresters in tropical America at present are British foresters in British Guiana, Trinidad and British Honduras, and American foresters in Porto Rico and Brazil. The only book of any importance on tropical forestry is "Timbers of Tropical America," by S. J. Record, published by the Yale University Press at New Haven. Some pamphlets have been issued by the Porto Rican service, and can be had by writing The Insular Forester, Rio Piedras, Porto Rico.

Parachute

YOU FALL about twelve times faster without a parachute, or around 119 miles an hour. With a chute—two if you have them—you drop to earth at a uniform rate of only about 15 feet a second.

Request:—"1. What are the different types of parachutes used in this country?

2. Who makes them?

3. Is that a new idea that the Department of Commerce got out about requiring parachute jumpers to wear two chutes in their jumps, or have professional jumpers always done that?

4. How fast will a man fall without a parachute?

5. How fast will he descend with a parachute opened?

6. Is there a terrific jerk when the parachute opens?"

—H. A. MCIVER, Huntington, Long Island

Reply, by Lieut. Jeffrey R. Starks:—1. The lobe chute.

The conventional type chute.

The triangular chute.

The chute using the pack cover as pilot chute.

There are several other types, but these are the main ones and the ones most widely used.

2. Lobe Chute—Russel Parachute Co., 1202 Kettner Blvd., San Diego, Cal.

Triangular Chute—Triangle Parachute Co., 4917 Carthage Ave., Norwood, Ohio.

Conventional type—Irving Air Chute Co., 523 Main St., Buffalo, N. Y.

Pack cover pilot type—Smith Safety Chute Co., 528 Genesee Bldg., Buffalo, N. Y.

3. Many professional jumpers have always worn

two chutes. It has long been compulsory in the Army and Navy. The Dept. of Commerce adopted this two-chute regulation in the interests of safety, the two-chute idea having been proven to be of value by Army and Navy experience. However, there are any number of jumpers who never had the price of a second chute and who are still living. There are a greater number, however, of one-chute jumpers who are *dead*. It is a good idea to use two chutes in practise jumping, although not practical to wear two chutes as safety devices while engaged in flying.

4. An average sized man without a parachute, or with an unopened chute strapped to him will not attain a speed greater than 119 miles per hour in a fall. After his jump he will accelerate until the 119 m.p.h. maximum is reached, when increased resistance of the air through which he is falling will equal his acceleration, when he will no longer accelerate, and hence continue to fall at uniform speed.

5. An average sized man with the average parachute will descend at a uniform speed of about 15 feet per second.

6. No, a good jerk, but not exactly terrific. If the straps are very loose they are apt to burn you, however.

Philippines

THE natives, their origins and their dialects.

Request:—"I would like to have a few questions answered in regard to the Philippine Islands.

1. What manner of people are the natives?

2. On the whole, are they friendly to the white man?

3. What is the principal dialect spoken throughout the Islands?"—WALTER MORRIS, Chicago, Illinois

Reply, by Mr. Buck Connor:—1. I take it from your question that you mean what type of people they are. Well, I can say they are of Malayan-Chino origin. To go back further would require reams of paper.

2. Yes, they are openly friendly, but in the southern islands they are treacherous and unreliable.

3. There are three main dialects: Tagalog: natives of Luzon, and other islands north of Samar generally speak it.

Visayan: natives south of Samar; islands including Negros, Panay Leyte speak it.

Cebuano is a dialect that is truly of the Island of Cebu.

Moro is spoken on Mindanoa, Sulu and all adjacent islands.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. DO NOT send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

A Complete list of the "Ask Adventure" experts appears in the issue of the fifteenth of each month

◎◎◎ *The* SCAR *of* FATE

By

W. C. TUTTLE

◎

Hashknife and Sleepy in a new Western Mystery Serial

And These Fine Stories ◎◎◎

BEYOND DEVIL'S ISLAND, a novelette of the French penal camps, by STEPHEN ALLEN REYNOLDS; UNDER THE PIN, a novelette of the World War in air, by ANDREW A. CAFFREY; THE PANTHER, a narrative of the Crusades, by HAROLD LAMB; ONE MAN'S FLAG, a story of the Rhodesian outlands, by L. PATRICK GREENE; NOT IN THE RITUAL, a story of the Foreign Legion, by GEORGES SURDEZ; SATIN AND SCIMITARS, a story of the wild folk, by F. ST. MARS; BASHA'S TREASURE, a story of Morocco, by GEORGE E. HOLT; and the conclusion of TRAITOR'S BANE, a novel of the South Sea rovers, by BASIL CAREY.

Still farther ahead

April 1st Issue

OLD-TIME pirate stories? We've heard that writing them is a lost art. But you'll dispute this heartily when you read "O'Brien, Buccaneer", by H. BEDFORD-JONES. Here's a novelette of high adventure on the Spanish Main, gorgeous in color, breath-taking in action, *teeming* with the spirit of those ruthless days. And we venture you will want to add a new star to your galaxy of great fictional heroes – O'Brien of the Irish Brigade!

Another exciting novelette in this issue will bring back to our pages WILLIAM CORCORAN, who gave us the remarkable prison tale, "The Blue Wall". It's called "Cornered", and describes the daring exploits of a discredited cop in bringing to justice a master racketeer and his notorious mob.

"Honor and Fidelity." The motto of the French Foreign Legion. J. D. NEWSOM writes a gripping tale of ideals in conflict, when father meets son within the ranks of these peerless fighting men.

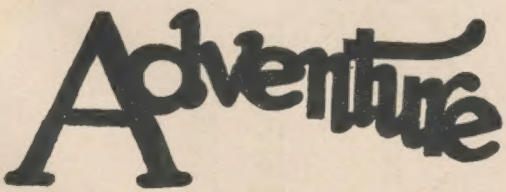
The last of HAROLD LAMB'S series of true stories of the Crusades, "The Trial of the Templars" completes the glamourous narrative that has made this *Adventure* author a national best-seller. This piece brilliantly pictures that dramatic moment of history when the heroic warrior-monks faced the stake on charges of heresy.

No sanctuary for cowards are the wilds of Rhodesia—at any time. In "Men", L. PATRICK GREENE shows what stuff it takes to make the grade in time of rebellion.

Does all this sound like real adventure? Well, there's much more in this issue, more than we've space to go into. But, skimming, there's—

A story of India by L. G. BLOCHMAN; a story of the Southern marshlands by RAYMOND S. SPEARS; a story of the Ivory Coast by LEO WALMSLEY; an animal story by PAUL ANNIXTER; and of course, Part II of "The Scar of Fate", the long awaited new Hashknife novel, by W. C. TUTTLE.

Certainly an issue to look forward to, if you know your



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